

Sermon for the Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

'Because of the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, I will go down to see whether they have done according to the outcry that has come to me.'

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'In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.' And all was right with the world, for He had created all that was. But this was not enough, so He went on, to create stars to be signs and galaxies to be wonders, and everything else that roams the dome of heaven.

Astronomers spend their entire lives gazing up at these glories, and are daily astonished by what they see, and by what they discover. But to God, this was still not enough.

So He made a world teeming with life of all kinds, birds of the air, fish of the sea, and beasts of the earth. A most wonderful world. A most good earth. But this was not enough.

This beautiful world, with its splendid heavens and awesome beasts, was not beautiful enough. In the eye of God, it was Lacking, for it lacked man. All these things were created for man, and to man, to be known by him, and for him to delight in. Without man, all these things are meaningless.

So the Lord made Man and woman, that they might together make many men, to make many homes, and many cities to dwell upon this good world, and *to be lord over it*. Lord over the *kosmos*, which is but a Greek word, meaning a beautiful thing.'

Yet we read that the Lord, speaking to Abraham, shall destroy those who dwell upon this world, these cities of Sodom and Gomorrah; they shall be destroyed, for their wickedness is heard not just by the moon and stars, but by the seraphs and thrones of the heaven beyond the heavens.

If there had been fifty who in gratitude thanked God for the good Earth, these would have been spared. If there had been forty five who praised the Almighty for the honor of being human, the earth beneath them would not have been shattered. If there were thirty who looked upon their Lord in penitence, seeking mercy, their towers would not have been overturned. If there had been twenty who put their hope in the Wisdom of God, then fire should not have rained from the skies rendering the works of man an inferno. If there had been ten who had *but faith the size of a mustard seed*, sulfur should not have consumed the land, crushing it into a dust of desolation, a desolation unlike the moon, not beautiful, but an abomination.

'What is man, that you are mindful of him, and the son of man, that you care for him?'

Man is the image and likeness of God, created to rule the heavens and the earth, and destined for the immortality of heaven. But man has rejected this mission. He will not rule creation, he will be ruled by it. Created as a king, man chooses to become a slave. Created above all creation, he chooses to be beneath all creation. Against eternity, he chooses mortality. Against the Eternal God, he chooses a passing flesh. Against the hope of resurrection, he chooses the fatalism of fallen human irrationality.

When God had offered a fish, they had chosen a serpent; for poison we preferred to medicine.

When God had offered an egg, they had chosen a scorpion; for suffering we preferred to salvation.

When God had offered bread, they had chosen a stone; for lifelessness we preferred to life.

In overturning Sodom and Gomorrah, God did not punish the inhabitants of that

wicked land. Rather, he gave them the desire of their hearts: a serpent, a scorpion, a stone; poison, suffering, death.

Abraham intercedes for the wicked lands, and God gives even ten of them a chance to ask for what is good; yet they rapaciously demand what is evil, and so evil is given to them. Evil given, to man, man who dwells upon the good Earth.

These are the words of our mouth, the prayers of our corrupted flesh, to ask for wealth, for success, for the gratification of our lusts; we pray for idolatry; we pray to be enslaved to created things; those things to which we were to rule over. We pray for this slavery, to these idols, for our tongue is forked, for in choosing the serpent over God, we chose the mouth of Satan over the Word of the Lord.

But the good Earth is rising over the horizon of the beautiful desolation of the moon, and, though it be Summer, Christmas is upon us, for the Word of God is made flesh, to bring to us a new mouth, a new tongue, a new prayer.

Our Lord Christ, made flesh, teaches us to pray. He does not say, *'when you pray, say something like "Our Father".'* He does not want us to be imaginative with words. He does not want us to pray our own words, for we who are fallen have no words of our own, only the serpent's. Rather He says *'when you pray, say "Our Father."*

He gives us His own word to make our own, that we may rightly pray for what is truly needful to us [and no longer worship ourselves]. That we may not pray for avarice, lust, ambition; but rather for faith, hope, and love.

For no longer should we, *who are evil*, pray for the serpent of our fall, but for the fish of our forgiveness, for in baptism, we are born again into living water, to breath the grace of the spring of baptism all the days of our everlasting life. Indeed this is our faith.

And no longer should we pray for the scorpion of our fleshly longings, but for the egg of our rebirth, for dwelling within the Holy Communion of the Church, we shall not die, but rest until the resurrection of our flesh to rest forevermore in the beauty of the Lord. This is our hope.

And no longer shall we pray for the stone of our sinful hard-heartedness, but for the bread of unity, bread which is made of many grains, yet in the fire of God's own compassion, is made one. This is our love.

These then, are the gifts promised by God, for which He pleads we ask in the Words of His Son.

For in the beginning, He looked upon the work of His creation, and *behold, it was very good*. And our God will not rest until [He '*disarms the rulers and authorities, an puts them to open shame*]; that He may once again look past the desolation of rebellion which we willed, and, by His redemption, rest; and [gaze upon His redeemed creation,]; in the Light of His speaking, to gaze upon 'a beautiful thing.'

For he will never '*forsake the work of his hands.*'

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Preached by Pastor Fields

Sermon texts: Genesis 18:17-33; Colossians 2:6-19; Luke 11:1-13