

Sermon for the Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

'And He went away from there.'

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And Our Lord *'went away from there'*. From where? From the crowd. From that crowd of which we spoke the week before. The crowd who jeered. The crowd who heckled. The crowd who ridiculed, who accused, who threatened. The crowd who knew only death, and reveled in it; even the death of a little girl.

Death is not without its seduction. Do not be deceived. Christianity is not a naïve faith. It is not a faith that teaches a happy life; a nice life; an easy way; a simple way.

There is nothing easy; there is nothing simple; there is nothing naïve about the Christian faith; for if there were, it would seduce the masses. If it offered great worldly gain, it would bribe the nations. But it does not.

Christ Himself knows the seduction of sin. Christ himself knows the seduction of death. He knows that death can seem a deliverance; that death can seem an atonement; that death can seem the answer to all questions. Christ knows, in His own body, that temptation which drove the wife of Job to cry out, pleading, *'Curse God, and die.'*

The Gospel which Jesus teaches sounds happy; sounds joyous. It is the Gospel which declares *'Little girl, I say to thee, arise.'* It is the Gospel which proclaims, *'Daughter, thy faith has made thee well. Go in peace.'*

But it is the Gospel which, even when He has left the crowd, causes the crowd to follow Him, even to the synagogue. And at the synagogue *'they heard him, and were astonished, and said "Where did this man get these things? What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty things done by his hands? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?" And they took offense at him.'* [Who is this

profane man who dares to teach, but a carpenter?]

'And they took offense at Him.'

Who is this, that heals the downtrodden, who raises the dead? Who heals the blind and lame, and casts wicked spirits out of the oppressed? It is Him who *they took offense at*.

Therefore, The Lord declares, *'Blessed is he who is not offended by Me.'*

What was it that offended the people? It was the words of His mouth, for *'no prophet was without honor, except in his hometown, and among his relatives and his own household.'*

Here we are, we who call ourselves Christians, we who call ourselves the followers of Jesus. We who are the *'mothers and brothers and sisters of Jesus'* of *'His own hometown, among his relatives, of his own household.'*

And yet, even among us, is Our Lord *'without honor'*? Do you *'take offense at him?'*

For we long for the simple, naïve Christianity. The Christ who takes it easy, the Christ who looks over the little things. Yet the Christ declares: *'If your eye causes you to sin, gauge is out, for it is better that your eye be rent into hell, than your whole being be cast into the unending fire.'*

'Does this offend you?'

For we long for the simple, naïve Christianity. The Christ who welcomes all, regardless of their identity or worries. Yet the Christ declares, *'Let the dead bury their own. Yet as for you; go, and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God.'*

'Does this offend you?'

For we long for the simple naïve Christianity. The Christ of family values, of family love; the Christ who votes Republican. The Christ who wishes you a fuller life. Yet the Christ declares, *'If any man comes to Me, and does not hate his father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, and also his own life, he cannot be My disciple.'*

'Does this offend you?'

For we long for the simple, naïve Christianity. The Christ that teaches peace and acceptance, apathy towards sin, and welcome towards impenitence. Yet the Christ declares, *'I came not to send peace, but a sword. And a man's foes shall be of his own household.'*

'Does this offend you?'

For we long for the simple, naïve Christianity. The Christ that teaches us to be glad, to not sweat the petty things, to not overlook the little things in life. To enjoy; to live, laugh, and love. Yet the Christ declares, *'Fear him who, after He has killed, has the power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him.'*

'Does this offend you?'

'And they took offense at Him.'

'And Jesus said, "Blessed is he who is not offended by me."'

There is nothing simple, there is nothing easy, there is nothing naïve about the Christian faith. It is not a religion of peace. It is not a religion of acceptance. It is not a religion that is politically acceptable. It is not a faith that governments tolerate. It is not a faith that people find beautiful. For if it was, Our Lord would have never taught, *'Blessed are you, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.'*

Our Lord would have never asked, *'Does this offend you?'*

Our Lord would have never promised, *'Blessed is he who is not offended by me.'*

Our Lord did not come to make friends. Our Lord did not come to ascend the heights of popularity, to make a name in politics, to become beloved by the masses, to become a cultural icon.

Our Lord came, that He might be crucified; and that He might be crucified because we *'took offense at Him.'*

Has anything that Jesus has said bother you? Has it offended you? Would you rather that He had never said it at all? Would you rather that He had never said *'Hate your mother and father?'* That He had never said *'I came not to bring peace, but a sword?'* Would you rather that He never said *'Whosoever looks upon*

another women with desire has committed adultery in his heart? That He had never said *'Whosoever divorces a woman, and marries another, is guilty of adultery?'* That He had never said *'Give away all that you have, and follow me?'*

[He is but a carpenter, and indeed, He has come to make for you a yoke of teaching]. If it offends you, then confess it. If it angers you, then cry it out. For He has come to be crucified, and we are here, we who are His family, to see to it that He be crucified, for *he is an offense to us*.

So do not be shy, do not let piety hold you back, but see yourself in the crowd, see yourself now, in that same crowd of death that followed Him to the house of Jairus' daughter, that wailed outside her door as she grew cold.

See yourself in that crowd that followed Him to Jerusalem, yelling out meaningless, hypocritical praise. See yourself before Pilate, calling for this wretched Jew's condemnation.

See yourself, ridiculing Him as He is lashed. See yourself laughing as He bleeds. For why not? *'He is an offense to you.'*

See yourself standing upon the mountain as He is raised up, crowned with the sign of blighted earth, drenched with the blood of aborted mankind.

See yourself, watching all the desires of your offense against the Son of Man made manifest in violence towards Him.

And hear Him speak. Hear what He has to say to you, who *took offense at Him*. To you, whose sin, and malice, and contempt he bore.

Perhaps, at that moment, you might feel shame. Seeing His wretchedness, you might feel pity, and pray, perhaps a prayer something like this:

'Have mercy upon us, O Lord, have mercy, for we have had more than enough of contempt. Our soul has had more than enough of the scorn of those who are at ease, of the contempt of the proud.'

But it will not matter what you pray, because, even as He suffers, He has prayed a prayer before it even occurred to you to feel any pity at all. He has prayed a prayer more powerful, more effectual, more permanent, than any you will ever pronounce.

'I will forgive their wickedness, and their sin shall I remember no more.'

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Preached by Pastor Fields

Sermon Texts: Ezekiel 2:1-5; 2 Corinthians 12:1-10; Mark 6:1-13.