

Sermon for the Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany

'For as by a man came death, by a man has come the resurrection of the dead.'

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Our Lord speaks to us, asking us to fulfill such beautiful commands. *'Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you.'* For what is more noble than to show mercy to those who sneer at you, who hold petty grudges from old times against you, who tell their wife and family and friends and neighbors exaggerated tales of times when you were not at your best, or at least that is how they remember it.

There is no defense against such slander and anger. Usually there is no reconciliation, man-to-man, where you both face your gripes and shake hands and make up. So the Lord tells us, *'love your enemies, and do good to those who hate you.'* For what is the alternative, but to hate them in return? But we are not to hate our brother, so we are left with one option: to love. And it is a noble, beautiful thing. The kind of thing medieval romances and Russian novels are made of.

In loving those who hate us, we sacrifice our pride. But our Lord continues, *'bless those who curse you. To the one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also. And from the one who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either.'*

Pride is, in its way, easy to sacrifice, because it is something in our own heart and mind. We can give away our pride on the outside, but still keep it on the inside, knowing that by not holding our enemy's hatred against us, we are being 'the bigger man.'

But what of someone who openly mocks and curses you? What of someone who beats you? What of someone who robs you of even the shirt off your back? And offers no resistance?

All of a sudden, the one who allows these things to happen to him no longer seems like the 'bigger man'. In fact, by our standards, he seems like no man at all. He seems small, pathetic, unable to stand up for himself. Not the kind of man that men want to be, nor the kind of man that women want to be with. Rather, he is a spineless wuss. Hollywood does not make movies about this kind of person, because we love to see a fighter, and we do not tolerate a loser.

If we were to see such a person, willfully defenseless, letting himself be smacked around, then be robbed and mocked, all without saying a word, we would not listen to any high minded talk or philosophy he might give after the fact about *loving enemies* and *offering the other cheek*, nor would we give a second thought to him prattling on about fulfilling the will of God in his weakness, or inheriting the kingdom by his poverty, robbed as he is. Rather, we would say simply '*He claims he will save others. He cannot even save himself.*'

What I have just said is no conjecture, no mere guess about what might happen. It is what did happen. For the man who loves those who hate Him and serves those who curse Him; the one that offers His cheek to those who would beat Him, and His tunic to those who strip Him; is it not the Lord?

Does He not speak of Himself? It must be, for He cannot be speaking of anyone else.

For we return hatred with hatred; we return curses with curses; we return violence with violence, or if we are unable, at least resentment and trauma. And to those who take from us what we value, we plot revenge, if only ever merely in our imagination.

We do this because we are sinful men, and sin clings to our heart like a cancer, and clings to our souls like an unborn child; we love it and care for it even as it destroys us, and not only us, but everyone around us who suffers from our pettiness and selfishness, which we are never willing to give up, because we know that we are always in the right, and we know this because all sin is pride.

That the evil of mankind that we imagine might have a limit, and the anguish it produces might come to an end, the Lord God gave to man death, not only that we might be punished, but that others might be spared, for among sinners, there is

no victim or perpetrator; there is only wrong; wrong that is done, and wrong that is returned.

Therefore it is written, '*by a man came death.*' For though Adam committed the Original Sin that brought sin into the world, every human ever since has signed their name onto the contract that our first father drew: that in doing evil, we would be condemned to a final evil, and that evil is death. St. Paul would not have been wrong if he had written, '*by every man came death,*' for there is no one innocent, *none that does good, no, not one.*

But there is a God that mankind hates, but that does not hate mankind. Rather, in love, He became man; this God of Joseph... He became a man, one named Jesus.

Hate him, and will he not love you, even as he looked up the rich younger ruler and loved him?

Curse Him, and speak every ill of Him; after all, He is pathetic, He cannot even save Himself. But He did not come to save Himself, did He?

Strike His cheek, beat Him. Make Him bleed in all His weakness. Mock His frailty, and when you have stripped Him of His dignity, His majesty, His honor, strip Him of His scarlet robe. He offers it freely. He does not resist you, for He has suffered all your sin, that you may enjoy all His power. His dignity, majesty, and honor. Take the royal garment He was mockingly clothed with by the Romans, and wear it as your own, even as you rob Him of everything that was His. His sinlessness, His righteousness, His immortality, the end of death, the death we earned.

Do you not see? He has come to be robbed by you, that all that is His might be yours. For how else could His word be fulfilled, when He said '*do good to those who hate you*'?

The Lord Jesus, the God of Joseph, is marched naked, stripped, robbed and cursed before *the people*, before us all; and Pilate, before the endless mass of transgressors, declares '*Behold, the man.*'

'For by a man has come the resurrection of the dead.'

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*Preached by Pastor
Fields*

Sermon Texts:

Genesis 45:3-15; 1 Corinthians 15:21-42; Luke 6:27-38.