

Sermon for the Seventh Sunday of Easter

'And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world.'

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'Woolen garments were highly valued. If he had the wool sweater laundered and had the lice steamed out of it, he could wear it himself. It had a nice pattern.'

So a man thought to himself trapped in a prison above the arctic circle, in a place called Kolyma, among many other prisoners, who had the misfortune of being Russian when Russia was under the rule of the Soviets.

Many of us know of the Gulag, the prison camps to which unnumerable souls were cast for crimes of thought, word, but rarely deed. Where labor was commanded out east in Siberia, labor for ten years, if one was lucky enough to live that long; for few did. Most died before their sentence was over, and that was the point. Undesirable people should die, and until they die, they should disappear.

This is the way of men.

Yet few know of Kolyma.

It was a peculiar form of punishment, invented by those who believed they would also invent heaven on earth. It was a region far beyond the North of Russia, where men without help were sent for the pettiest and most political of crimes. Crimes such as being a doctor or a scholar or a Jew. These were sent to the empty frozen wastes of the cold north where nothing ever thawed, that they might be punished. Punished for being as many people are; of being inconvenient.

This is the way of men.

There in the wasteland, hidden in bunkers made of thatched straw, after a

sixteen-hour day of labor, these so-called criminals would retire; and in the day-long darkness of winter, they would crowd by the faint light of a stove and play cards.

Yet they did not play to pass time or to gain enjoyment. They played to gather to themselves the belongings of another. They gambled for clothing, even as the soldiers gambled for the cloth of Christ. Even in such misery, these prisoners sought only for gain. The gain of a woolen garment, highly valued, free from lice, for it had a nice pattern. Heed not that attaining such a coat might leave another so unclothed that he might freeze in the icy storm of the tundra. He is just a mortal, that he should die. But you might be warmed at his expense, by a garment, free from lice.

What more could be wanted in this beautiful world? People are expendable, and are quickly to be killed, for with every death the politicians say we are that much closer to paradise, and with every death, the commoner is that much closer to comfort. Should we love our neighbor as ourselves? We cannot even love ourselves, therefore we must hate our neighbor.

This is the way of men.

The Lord prays, *I do not ask you to take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.*

Indeed, this is a wicked world we are bound to. Do you not see it every day? Every human heart bleeds with unkindness, for we all think that by ridiculing our friend, our spouse, our child, our boss, our employee, we might gain something with a nice pattern, free from lice. This hatred we covet in ourselves, that we might be kept warm.

The Lord comes to abolish this world. Not that we shall not live in it, but that we shall not live of it. That we should not seek the life another, but should live in all peace and quietness; that we should know only Christ, the one true God, the truth, and the source of all salvation, and know our neighbors are fellow sheep in the one flock of the Almighty.

The Lord clothes us in baptism; the lamb of God gives us his coat, a cloth of wool of many colors, a nice pattern, without lice. Will you not wear this new garment, in this beautiful world?

This the Lord has given you. Be grateful therefore, for it is written:

'And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.'

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Preached by Pastor Fields

Sermon Texts: Acts 1:12-26; 1 John 5:9-15; John 17:11b-19.