

Sermon for the Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.”

+INJ+

Who, then, shall not burn? *This is a hard saying*, for who is there among us who has not mocked our neighbor in annoyance, or in anger, calling him a fool, an idiot, a moron, for any number of reasons?

You are a liar if you claim you have not, you may have said it or thought it in jest. But this is no excuse, for lying, too, is a sin, for the Christ has said *‘let your yes be yes, and your no be no.’*

And yet, our neighbor is the least to be mocked. Shall we not mock our God?

It is this God that created a world filled with our neighbors, fallen, annoying, wanting. How could we not curse them?

It is this God that made us male and female, that we should be joined together, husband and wife, one to resent the other, one to never understand the other. How should we not grow bothered by them?

It is this God that made an earth filled with trifling, ignorant, and evil people, evil by nature of their fall in the garden, a garden that God Himself made. How could we not hate such people? How could we not hate such a God?

We do hate such a God, for having put us in such a world, a world full of people, people we curse.

Yet we are told that to curse such people makes us liable *to the hell of fire*. Of course it does, for in cursing people, any person, you should know, you curse the image of God.

Curse God and die, says the wife of Job. Curse God's image, and die as well.

This is a hard saying.

Who can live a life without resentment toward one's neighbor? Who can live one's life without resentment toward the image of God? Who can live one's life without resentment toward God? The God that we so dearly long to curse?

You might think that you would never curse God, as if you were more virtuous than Job, who cursed God for thirty chapters of the Bible, and yet was spared.

Yet Job was spared because he cursed God in prayer, demanding an answer, an answer God gave him, and spared his life, for God loves the one who prays to Him.

But we do not always pray. Often, we just curse, we curse God, and die, *in the hell of fire*. For how could God have given us such suffering in this life? Why should we call Him good when He seems the author of agony?

I do not speak of a theoretical scenario. God made flesh, the very Christ, walked upon this earth. And on this earth He spoke of many things, of the kingdom of Heaven, of the fallenness of man, of our utter inability to save ourselves.

We nailed Him to a cross, to watch Him bleed, so disgusting did we find His teaching. For when He said we could not save ourselves, we responded, *He claims to save others, let him save himself*. For it is our way, we humans, to mock those we dislike. And Him, the Lord of all, we hated.

A pagan governor gave us an offer, to save either Barabbas or Jesus. To Barabbas we said 'Yes.' To Jesus, we said 'No.' And this was given to us, *that our yes be yes, and our no be no*.

So the God of Glory bled.

Our hatred was fulfilled in the killing of the Christ.

As was His love.

Did you not know that Christ loves you, even against your hatred? For He is not as fallen men who curse those who sin against Him, but blesses them, as it is written *'pray for those who hate you.'*

Did you not know this?

'For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.'

'You fool.'

+INJ+

Preached by Pastor Fields

Sermon Texts: Deuteronomy 30:15-20; 1 Corinthians 3:1-9; Matthew 5:21-37.