

Sermon for the Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany

'Thus saith the Lord: "Cursed is he who trusts in man."'

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The Lord has spoken. Who, then, would be so foolish as to deny His wisdom?

It is true that nature brings upon some people disaster and illness, misery and mishap. Some are born with deformities. Some are stricken with cancer. Some endure tempests of the weather; their homes flooded, their lands drowned, their lives lost to frost and water.

'But cursed is he who trusts in man.'

For what nature does on occasion out of unthinking, blind chance, man does ceaselessly through reasoned, intentional arrangement. *'The heart of man is deceitful above all else, and desperately wicked. Who can understand it?'* For men do not bring about mere storms, but create ceaseless and endless storms of war, year upon year, decade upon decade, millennia upon millennia; the willful slaughter of the image of God.

The tsunami which shook Asia killed many hundred. Horrific indeed. But this many, and ten times more, die in any given day among the unborn, and the just born, in this country; and this we proclaim it to be, as a society, beautiful; proof of our liberty.

Hurricane Katrina, which many of you know personally, killed as many as two thousand people. Horrific indeed. But this many, and ten times more, died in any given minute of the Battle of the Somme in the First World War, a battle conceived and planned in the minds of generals and executed by the bullets and bayonets of youths in search of glory. And this we proclaim, 'sweet and fitting' as a society, beautiful; proof of our patriotism.

The death of the soldier sacrificed needlessly is sanctified by the prayer of Isaiah,

'walk through the fires, and you shall not be touched.'

The death of the unborn sacrificed needlessly is sanctified by the prayer of Abel, whose innocent blood the Lord hears '*crying from the ground.*'

It is not a point we should look over briefly, the unsearchable depth of human evil. Even as all the world still plunges ceaselessly into civil war and border conflict, we Americans who like to think ourselves above battles waged against impoverished nations with bombs and artillery, still war against the poorest of all, '*to whom the kingdom of God is given*' with clamps and forceps, who cannot *weep*, and so will never *laugh*. 'We grieve over the pain of dogs, but not for the blood of fish. Blessed are those who have voice.' And cursed among sinful men are those who have no voice. '*Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.*' But the little children who have died shall come to the Father, because of the prayer of the blood of Abel.

Less than a century ago, men like you and me, wearing glasses and ties, drinking coffee and beer, took council together to kill every Jew in Europe, and put to death over six million innocent souls of Israel. But the darkest wickedness is not found in their desire to do this, but that, in order to do so, some architect and designer, politely following orders, coldly and unemotionally designed extermination chambers and gas rooms and death camps, and rejoiced upon having his designs commended and implemented, because his fellow man thought him clever and intelligent. Clever in the art of designing houses of death. Intelligent in engineering the tools of human annihilation.

'The heart of man is deceitful above all else, and desperately wicked.' 'Cursed is he who trusts in man.'

But 'blessed is the man who walks not in the council of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.'

Do you count yourselves among the '*blessed who walk not in the council of the wicked*'? Is your meditation '*upon the law of the Lord day and night*'? Of what child of Adam, then, is this Psalm sung? Of what daughter of Eve does the ancient poet show forth praise? '*What is man, that he can be pure? Or he that is born of woman, that he can be righteous?*' '*The will of the children of men is evil constantly*' it is written. And '*God saw how diseased the world had become, for all*

the people of the world had corrupted their ways.'

Yet there is one, born of woman, one alone, of the line of Adam; of the line of Eve, of his mother Mary, of his Father in heaven. Behold, '*He comes down and stands on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem who come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. And he healed them all.*'

He alone walks not in the council of the wicked.' He alone 'sits not in the seat of scoffers.' Jesus, the Christ; who 'comes down and stands.' Who 'purified those possessed by unclean spirits.' 'Who cures them all.'

He has come down who 'delights in the law of the Lord'. And, 'though being in the form of God, emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.' 'Yet without sin.'

'The Son of Man' has appeared among us, 'full of grace and truth'. For 'he shall be as a tree planted by streams of water, and his leaf shall not wither, and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.'

For He is divine reason, and for this reason He came, that He might become for us a tree, even a *tree of the cross*. Water shall flow from his side. Never shall His tree wither. '*All nations shall knee, and every tongue confess, that he is Lord.*' For He came to us *while we are yet evil*, '*while we were still sinners.*' And why? '*to cure us all*'. For we are a murderous and adulterous generation, who '*make flesh our strength.*' But by the adulterous murder of the Son of Man upon the tree *which shall not wither* by cursed mankind shall cursed mankind be redeemed by the Son of Man.

Therefore, '*Blessed is the man.*'

But what madness is this, that mankind, so corrupt, so sinful, so evil, bound by every perversion, celebrating every insanity, delighting in the spilling of blood, angered by the showing of mercy; what cruelty is this that He alone who is innocent should be murdered, and that by His murder, our cruelty should be made into our salvation? What sick joke is this? A joke indeed, for the Romans ridiculed him, commanding '*prophecy!*' But '*woe to you who laugh now, for you shall weep.*' Look to coming Lent, to coming Holy Week, to Good Friday; to the Man scourged and lashed, crowned with fallen thorns, bearing His tree to the

mount of his crucifixion, consoling, as tradition has it, the tears of His blessed mother as He falters, saying '*Behold, I am making all things new.*' 'What language shall you borrow' to express the infinite injustice enacted by us against this Man who comes to redeem us by His blood? There is no tongue which can express the shame and guilt that you should feel, the disgrace of your iniquity. Therefore, borrow not the tongue, but the tears of Holy Mary, as she weeps over her Son, as she weeps over the driving of nails into His holy hands, as she weeps at the raising of His cross, as she weeps as He is pierced by the lance of Longinus, as she weeps while he torn down from the tree; the *tree which shall never wither*. Borrow her tears, and weep, and wait, even just three days, for the Son of Man teaches you today:

'Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.'

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Preached by Rev. Fields

Sermon texts: Psalm 1, Jeremiah 17:5-8, Luke 6:17-26