

Sermon for the Sixth Sunday of Easter

'Take heart, I have overcome the world.'

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The world is infested with madness. Nothing of it makes any kind of sense. It all seems reversed, wrong. It all seems fractured, shattered, broken. What should be, is not. What should not be, is.

Thucydides, a Greek historian, wrote that, in war, all things are backwards; children protect their parents; parents bury their children.

What this Greek historian tells us about war, the Sacred Scriptures tell us of all human existence. Everything is reversed, in peace as in war, in youth as in old age. Humanity is broken, the world is broken.

This fracture, this reversal, this madness that seems woven into the very essence of the universe is what we call 'original sin'. And it is indeed woven into the universe, and we were the weavers.

The Scriptures do tell us the origin of this madness: our first parents decision to depart from God Himself, from existence itself, and forge their own vision, their own way, *to eat of the tree*. Yet there is only one God, one existence, one reality, and to depart from that God is to depart from reality, to choose unreality over reality, to choose madness over sanity. Adam chose madness, and mankind became mad.

Of course, we believe ourselves all to be perfectly rational; that our every decision and feeling is rooted in logic; but reality tells us otherwise; our vices and viciousness; our constant arguments and fighting; our addictions and abuses. Our rage; our jealousy; our lust; our despair. Logic is our conceit. Insanity is our fact.

Our Gospel reading speaks of perhaps the most insane moment in history, and insane in two ways.

Jesus, who has healed the blind, and cleansed the leper; Who has washed the feet of mortal men, yet blinded with divine glory; Who has never sinned, yet dines with sinners; Who lifts up the whore in forgiveness, and rebukes the proud in justice; this Jesus is soon to be put to death as an enemy of the people, an enemy of the state, an enemy of God.

Has the world known any greater act of madness? That healing should be met with bloodlust; that compassion should be met with wrath; that mercy should be met with severity; that righteousness should be met with rebuke; that life should be rewarded with a torturous death. This mankind found reasonable, and so proved our irrationality.

Yet Jesus Himself seems to display what may seem His own insanity, for He speaks, saying: *'I have overcome the world.'* In the past tense, as if it has been completed, as if it is done. Even as Judas conspires with envious priests and resentful Pharisees; even as he leads a cohort of Roman legionaries to arrest our Lord; even as the wood of the cross is being hewn, that our Lord may be tormented upon it, our Lord speaks, *'I have overcome the world.'* Has the world ever known any greater words of madness? That arrest should be met by our Lord with peace; that ridicule should be met with kindness; that torture should be met with patience; that crucifixion should be met with acceptance; that execution should be met with forgiveness, even forgiveness of the unjust executioner.

We, who are but a jeering crowd, in senseless frenzy, scoff aloud, yelling: *'He saved others; he cannot even save himself.'*

A lone Roman soldier, standing amid the crowd, in quiet sensibility, whispers to himself: *'Truly, this was the Son of God.'* Who then is mad, and who is sane? Is Judas, who was likely experienced with

many years, wise, and Jesus who is but a man of thirty, foolish? Does the great tumult of the mocking masses possess the wisdom of the masses, while the lone heathen soldier possesses only a private vanity?

Jesus is dead. See him hang. He is lifeless; He drapes from the cross, His chest expands no more with living breath. He is left to rot for a short while. Then the nails are taken out of His sacred hands and feet. He falls limp and listless upon the bloodstained dust, the dust sanctified by His blood. The dust which shall choke the serpent all the days of his damnation.

'I have overcome the world.' *'And it was the third day.'* And behold these words of seeming madness are proven utterly real, for behold the tomb, and it is empty; and behold the Christ, for He has risen; and behold *'his hands and his side, and be no longer unbelieving, but believing.'* Be no longer insane, but sane. Be no longer in madness, but at peace, for the Son of God has throttled the inferno and risen above all the lies of the devil and his false world.

In His victory over death and all sin by His Resurrection, Christ has given reason to what no man could understand, and indeed no man did understand. What seemed broken, He made whole. What seemed fragmented, He fused together, what seemed shattered, He recreated. In Him, all that seemed backwards, the death of an innocent man, a good man, a perfect man, a perfect God, is not only overcome, but redeemed, and cast forth forever into the future, unto eternity.

It is a trite aphorism to say 'everything has a reason.' But it is a truism to say Christ, who is reason, has everything; and nothing occurs that is not to be redeemed by the grace our Lord Christ has granted to all who hear His voice.

Still now, while we suffer through this vale of tears, it is as Thucydides once wrote: everything is backwards; the wicked prosper, and the good are oppressed; the Church struggles, while political powers ravage the world; innocent children are murdered, while murderers are pronounced innocent. Parents bury their children.

The Christian soul cries out: 'Why?' The Christian soul does nothing but quote the

cry of King David. And in Christ's death and resurrection, an answer is given: that what seems to be madness on behalf of God shall be proven to be peace, and what seems insanity on behalf of God shall be proven to be reason.

It is a provisional answer, not a full answer. It is a promise of an answer, not the substance of one. We must wait a short time, even as Christ waited three days in the tomb, and have faith, that by faith we might be given reason.

For our lives are *'as the grass, which is for but a day, then withers'*, and with our death shall come the last day, *'and in that day, whatever you ask the Father in Christ's name, He will give you.'* You shall have no question, all will be made clear, all will be made peace, your soul shall suffer no more, but at last be at rest in God.

'That your joy may be full.'

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Preached by Pastor Fields

Sermon Texts: Acts 16:9-15; Revelation 21:9-14, 21-27; John 16:23-33.