

Sermon for the Third Sunday after Pentecost

'Go nowhere among the gentiles.'

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It is a strange thing to read. For just recently, the Feast of the Holy Trinity, we heard Christ command His disciples to *'go unto all nations.'* Yet now, in this hour, they shall only go unto *'the lost sheep of Israel,'* *'for he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.'*

His heart broke, our God of compassion, for He looked upon His people, and saw that they were as they always were: lost.

Therefore, the Christ fulfills the commandment: *'to love thy neighbor as thyself.'*

In our age of decadence, we often misinterpret this teaching to mean that we should love all the world a lot, that we should be generically empathetic to every hypothetical person we might imagine. We find our righteousness in giving to a charity that feeds the destitute in Ethiopia or liberates the oppressed in Syria. We do not look to our left and to our right, and hurt, knowing that even these, however affluent, however well-composed, suffer from *every affliction.*

The Lord does not care to love the hypothetical person. He cares to help the actual person, *his neighbor.* For the command, *love thy neighbor as thyself,* means exactly what it says.

'Love' for such is the being of God, and no one is of God who knows not love. For even as God causes the *rain to fall upon the just and the unjust,* so are we to love, both the righteous and the unrighteous.

And we are to *love thy neighbor.* The word *neighbor* both in Hebrew, Greek and English means the same thing, *'the one that is near you.'* How easy it is to love the hypothetical person. The person who has no face; the person that, as far as

you are concerned, has no more reality than the fiction of a novel. Those oppressed people of so many categories, that have so many funds and non-profits on their behalf. How easy it is. But our Father commands us not to love these faceless abstractions. Rather from the beginning of His giving of the Law, He has burdened His chosen with a much heavier demand: that we love those who are near to us; those who we know face to face; those whose weaknesses and sins and hatreds we are most intimately acquainted with. These, we are told, to love; those to the left, and to the right. Those who are most likely to have done us wrong; those who are most likely to have injured us, to have angered us; those whom we might consider jerks and insensitive mad men, to use the only terms that are allowable in a sanctuary; those whom the Bible would call 'enemies.' It is no novelty that our Lord also commands us to *love and pray for our enemies*, for no one ever truly hated a stranger. To hate an enemy, one must see him face to face. Only a neighbor can be a foe.

But the command continues, that we are to *love thy neighbor as thyself*. As *thyself*, this is often confused by many who think that this means something along the lines of 'we should love our neighbor about as much as we love ourselves.' But this is not a question of quantity, but of quality. It is not a question of how much we love, but simply how we love. We are to *love our neighbor*, as our very selves, for they are ourselves. *No man ever hated his own body*, and we all draw our existence from the one body of Adam, the father of all. Therefore, we cannot hate our neighbor, for our neighbor, that one that is near you, is you, so lose yourself in them, or you will never find your *self*.

This is love, and nothing else. For no one has known love who has not lost his own self in his neighbor, whether at any given moment that neighbor, that one *near you* be your spouse, your child, your friend, your enemy. These crowds about you, all those whom you know, these the Lord wishes you to *have compassion on*. These names, who you know.

The day will come, even as it has come, where our Lord shall have compassion upon all mankind, sending His disciples *unto all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*. But for now, He fulfills the commandment, to love those near unto Him.

He has compassion, for He is God, and God is love. So the Lord determines to deliver those who mass about Him from their afflictions

His disciples are sent out to His own blood, the children of Israel, *to heal every disease and affliction, to cast out unclean spirits*. They are not to go to the Gentiles, for the Lord shall first *love his neighbor*, love those near Him.

And even as Christ *is all and is in all*, so in curing the blind and healing the sick and liberating the possessed, the Lord saves His own body, for *he became man*. He became one with all this wretched flesh, and took on all its misery, that He might heal it all, in His love, for *no man ever hated His own body*.

So go out the twelve in the name of Jesus, to heal and cast out and to mend, all those of the people of God, all those who see the face of Christ. That He might fulfill the commandment, to *love thy neighbor as thyself*, and, moreover, *'to love thy enemy,'* for it is precisely these children of Israel which shall crucify Him, who shall shed the blood of the Lord of Glory; indeed, it is the closest neighbor of all, this neighbor whom Christ loved, that shall *cast the first stone*.

For who went out? Peter and Andrew, James and John, Thomas, Matthew, Simon, and *Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him*.

Therefore give thanks and sing to the One who draws near, for:

'Greater love hath no man than this.'

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Preached by Pastor Fields

Sermon Texts: Exodus 19:2-8; Romans 5:6-15; Matthew 9:35-10:8.