

Sermon for the Third Vespers of Lent

'So the men turned from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the Lord.'

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Even the heathen know the name of Sodom. It is synonymous with the very nature of debauchery, decadence, and sin.

Abraham pitches his tent outside the great city, and angels disguised as men come to him for shelter, after being convinced by Lot that there is no place for them in *town square of Sodom*.

The denizens of the city come out to Lot and Abraham, and demand that these angels, now guests of Abraham, be brought into the city to engage in their evil works. These two patriarchs will not allow it, and offer in their stead their daughters. The Sodomites are angered, and threaten to *deal worse with Lot than with the guests*.

When they *press hard* against Lot, the Lord strikes them with blindness, that they weary themselves with groping about for the door.

The darkness of the sin of citizens of this great city is deeper than the vice we euphemistically refer to as 'Sodomy'. They are not merely perverse fornicators, but violators of the law of hospitality, blackmailers breathing hateful threats, overcome with passions and lusts, seeking only to fulfill their own desires, and caring nothing for the needs of the wandering. They are without compassion or holy suffering, but know only appetite. So *an outcry has come before the Lord*. And for this reason, God shall overturn this wicked city.

The land of Sodom should sound familiar to every man, for it can be found

everywhere,
at every time, in any place; for Sodom is a metropolis built within the heart
of every man.

Do not be too quick to pass over this thought; we are in a season of
contrition, of self-examination; therefore, let us be contrite, and examine
ourselves.

Quiet your mind, and peruse its town square, its gardens and markets. What is
to be seen? What is bought and sold? What is supplied and demanded in the
imagination of your heart? Is not lust
manufactured in its workshops, and perverse thoughts bought up by your will? Is
not selfishness displayed throughout its public places, and self-love, or
perhaps self-loathing painted upon the walls of its private homes? Is not
kindness to strangers despised in favor of a preference for privacy and
freedom? Do you look forward to the feasts of indulgence, where you enjoy
vacations and finery and food? Or do you look forward to the fasts of charity,
where you give *not only your cloak, but
your tunic also*, and receive nothing in return?

Sodom is a great and overflowing city, for it sprawls its highways and builds
its squares in the soul of all mankind.

*'Abraham stood before the Lord. Then
Abraham drew near and said, "Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the
wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city. Will you then sweep
away the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous that are within it?"'*

The Lord is merciful and kind, forgiving, and *overflowing with steadfast love*.

*'If I find fifty righteous in the city, I
will spare the whole place for their sake.'*

For the Lord punishes not the righteous but *delivers them from evil*, and *his
ear attends to their voice*, that for the sake of their intercessions, even
with wicked may be spared.

Yet fifty cannot be found in Sodom. So desperate is the city. So Abraham asks
if the Sodomites might be saved for the sake of forty five.

The Lord is merciful and kind, forgiving, and *slow to anger*.

So for the sake of forty five, declares the Lord, *'I will not destroy it.'*

Yet forty five cannot be found in Sodom. So deep is their malice. So Abraham asks if the Sodomites might be saved for the sake of forty.

The Lord is merciful and kind, forgiving, *abundant in healing and truth*.

So for the sake of forty, declares the Lord, *'I will not do it.'*

Yet forty cannot be found in Sodom. So vast is their iniquity. So Abraham asks if the Sodomites might be saved for the sake of thirty.

The Lord is merciful and kind, forgiving, and *desires the death of no man*.

So for the sake of thirty, declares the Lord, *'I will overlook your former sins.'*

Yet thirty cannot be found in Sodom. So great is their pride. Finally, Abraham asks if for the sake of ten, the great city of Sodom might be redeemed.

But ten righteous cannot be found, not there, not then, not now, not ever. *'For there is none righteous, no, not one.*

There is none that understands, none that seek after God. They have all gone off the way. There is none the does good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulcher, and with their tongues they use deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips.'

No mortal, born of flesh, does good; none are holy; we are all children of Sodom, lost and vicious; overcome by our flesh and our pride. No mortal does good, and this should not surprise us, for it is written: *'there is none good but God.'*

It seems there is no hope for us; our fallen race must be overturned, even the great city of old was destroyed.

But Abraham does not ask what would seem to be the final question: *'Oh let the Lord not be angry. Behold I have undertaken to speak to the Lord. Suppose one is found that is righteous.'*

The Lord smiles, and has spoken: *'By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin. But by the gift of grace, which is by one man, shall the many be saved.'*

That one man, the Lord Christ, for the sake of we citizens of Sodom, soon shall enter the Holy City, made hollow, riding upon a colt, to fulfill the Word of His Father:

'I have set my king on my holy hill of Zion.'

'Kiss the Son, lest he be angry.'

And ask, *'Why do the nations rage?'*

Upon a cross shall you kiss him, and say:

'Truly this was a righteous man.'

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*Preached by Pastor
Fields*

*Sermon Texts: Genesis
18:16-33, Psalm 2.*