

# Sermon for the Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost

*“Seek the Lord and live,  
lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph,  
and it devour, with none to quench it for Bethel,  
O you who turn justice to wormwood  
and cast down righteousness to the earth!”*

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The Pharisees, we have seen, seek to tear down the authority of the Lord, for they despise the stricture of His instruction, and the burden of His wisdom. For in the freedom to divorce they found gratification for the flesh against the weight of love, even as in the blowing of a trumpet when throwing alms to the needy, they *found the sweetness of stolen water* against the poverty of glory.

In their conceit, they boast of keeping *the last jot and tittle of the Law*, believing that in such *they have received their reward*; yet now one comes to abolish all the vain-glory of man, and His presence before their haughty visage they find intolerable.

Thus, *they hate him who reproveth at the gate of their heart, and they abhor him who speaks the truth*. For though making the pretense of righteousness, they *trample upon the poor, and exact taxes of grain on him*. Taxes, we shall see, that will only be paid in holy blood, even the blood of the Son, for *in blood alone is life*.

Children of Adam, we wish to see in ourselves a soul meek and mild, unable yet willing; frail yet well-meaning; a sympathetic little thing. We do not see the serpent that crawls from our mouth as we speak of our neighbor, nor the scorpion in our hand that we hold out to the helpless, nor the bribe our pride invites as we make a show of service; for service makes the best and kindest show; it is even done with a smile.

Who does not choose some mission in his life, great or small, by which to judge himself righteous, and others wanting? Who does not quietly invite attention to his generosity, that he may be known as generous, or speak of his dedication to manifold missions of selfless benevolence, that we may be known as benevolent.

How often do we hear of our friend's dedication to human rights, civil rights, or any other kind of right, since in our nation, there is nothing more praiseworthy than getting what is right?

How frequently do we endure the muted advocacy for some kind of justice, or the not so muted protests against some kind of oppression? If all we say were to be believed, we would all at once be overflowing with saccharine magnanimity, unfathomable generosity, indescribable social consciousness, and a lion's spirit of equity and fairness that is nothing less than heroic.

But to such Homeric operas of our own works and days, the lyre of the Psalmist accuses us, and our mouths, which are but *an open sepulcher*, and indeed, one that *must be stopped*.

We despise the truth, for the truth *lays all things naked before the Word of God, which is as a two-edged sword against the neck of him who speaks lies*, which is to say, against us.

The prophet John so comes into the world declaring, *'Repent, therefore, and believe the Gospel, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'*

Indeed a kingdom which *reproves in the gate*, and a king who *knows how many are our transgressions, and how great our sins*. What is more terrifying to us, fellow man, than *Him who knows?*

So we are implored by one who seeks our salvation: *'take care brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.'* Who then, follows the Lord?

Now it once happened that as the Christ was *setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, 'Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?'* The Son responds with a degree of hostility. *'Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.'*

Yet before He gives time for any response, Jesus simply says to this young man,

*'you know the commandments. "Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, do not defraud, honor your father and mother."*

Of course the Good Teacher would say such a thing, for He repeats only what this young man's greatest teacher, Blessed Moses, has taught him all the days of his life: the Law of God, His precepts and rules; His wisdom and path. This is the way of God, *who alone is good*.

But in keeping such commands, the youth does indeed follow the will of God, and yet he is not good, for he is not like unto God the Almighty.

*And he said to him, 'Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth.'*

*And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, 'You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven: come, follow me.'*

It is written that the young man is *disheartened by the saying, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions*. For indeed, this is a man that *hungers and thirsts after righteousness*. Yet a burden seems to be placed on him that no man can carry.

It is our instinct to ascribe hypocrisy to the boy, even insincerity, that he really did not care to enter heaven, at least not at such a price, so he goes away to be comforted by his riches.

But we should not be so presumptuous to rain condemnation on this man, for who are you to judge a *broken and contrite heart*. Do not make yourself *greater than your master*. Behold, the Lord Christ looks upon this soul, and *loved him*. Shall you too not love him whom the Master has loved? See how the rich ruler leaves Jesus' presence, *sorrowful, for he had great possessions; sorrowful, for he indeed plans to give every last part of it away, and follow Christ*.

Yet, even wrapped in but a linen garment, in the Garden of the Lord's suffering, he runs away in fear, naked, dropping his last possession. For no one can enter the kingdom of heaven bound by any earthly thing, for *having your hand to the plough, you must not look back, just as to escape the temptation of your Egyptian mistress you must abandon the cloak to her hand, for even Elijah, when he was taken into the heavenly places could not take his mantle with him, but left to the*

*world the garments of the world.*

You see, in becoming naked, in abandoning himself, and all his strength, all his soul, and all his mind, and fleeing the Christ, he leaves Christ to go forward where he may not follow. He allows the lamb to enter the table of slaughter, that his unclean blood might not be mixed with the clean, and the *impure rag* hide the Virgin Born.

He has emptied himself of everything, [and given it away, and in so doing, has become like his Good Teacher.]

Now, he has been humiliated, and in his humility despairs of himself. Do you see now why the Lord *looked at him, and loved him? The Lord will have pity on his servants.*

The rich young ruler flees the sword and spear of the soldier, and the One Sacrifice loves him, and looks toward the Holy Tree, that such lowliness should not be chastised, but that him who has repented may see the kingdom, even the kingdom of the face of God.

Do you not see why the Lord *looked at him, and loved him?*

*'A broken and contrite heart, you will not despise.'*

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*Preached by Pastor Fields*

*Sermon Texts: Amos 5:6-7, 1)-15; Hebrew 3:12-19; Mark 10:17-22.*