

Sermon for the Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost

'The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, but Christ holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever.'

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For the priesthood of old were mortal, and death comes to all; and they were many in number, for many priests were needed to shed much blood for the iniquity of so many sinners.

It was the duty of priests to shed blood, *for in blood is life*, and so the Law given to Moses, to Aaron, and to his children required the letting of much blood, for much is the evil of man.

This blood was to be poured out regularly; evening and morning; on feast days and festival seasons; upon the timber of one's house, in the sanctuary of the Lord's tent; in the fine masonry of the great Temple of Zion.

And all was to be shed to propitiate the Lord for the malice of humanity; the Lord shown us in the Old Testament; an invisible God; whom no man can *see and live*.

For our first father, and his wife, alone were given to behold God, as He was, *in the cool of the evening*. Yet this vision they forsook, for they longed to see something else; to have *their eyes opened*, to see *good and evil*; to know nakedness and cunning. To know not merely what God had created, that is, *what is good*; but to know what God had not created, what only contingent flesh could manifest in its perversion; to know not only good, but evil.

This our fathers wanted to see, and this they saw, for *their eyes were opened*. For there is a beauty to all evil, or else we would not lust after it. All know that war is hell, yet we delight in war stories, for we delight in hell. All know that murder is hatred, yet we all love a story of a just revenge, for we love hatred. All know that

gluttony is unbecoming, yet we all love the sight of a gorgeously laid out holiday feast, for we no longer wish to become.

We love seeing these things, for all evil has a beauty of its own, for all evil is a reflection of good, *though through a mirror darkly*. We love a war story, for there is a true war in heaven, between God and the devil and all his angels. We love a revenge story, for *vengeance is mine, saith the Lord, I shall repay*. We all love a great meal, for there is an unending wedding feast that is to come, life-giving and eternal.

Yet these heavenly things we fail to see; we see only their sinful shadows in the works of hateful and lascivious men carried out in this passing world, for, to us, whose eyes were opened by Adam, this is all we can see; the shadow, and not that which casts it.

For when the eyes of man were opened to *good and evil*, they were blinded to that which is only good, and good alone, *for who is good but God?*

Therefore, the Lord established a priesthood, *many in number*, to sacrifice to the God who is good, the God we had been blinded to, the invisible God, countless offerings of sheep and goats and bulls and doves; that their blood might show to us the blood required of us. And great indeed is the blood required.

It was not for no reason that humanity, save eight, was abolished from the face of the earth in the time of Noah. It was not for no reason that Egypt was smitten by ten plagues, the last being the death of all who opened the womb. It was not for no reason that Israel was enslaved by a foreign nation and erased from history in the time of Jeremiah. They could not see the God that punished them for their wickedness. So they were given to see the blood of their suffering; a shadow of the thing required.

A man has come to Jericho, *full of grace and truth*. As He goes, this one called Jesus, He is beckoned by a certain man, called blind. Bartimaeus cries to Him. He is told to be silent; him who has no sight is told to have no voice by which to call upon the name of the Lord; atheism in its simplicity, to neither see God, nor speak to Him. But Bartimaeus cries out evermore for the Christ, for it is commanded, *'call upon me in the day of trouble; and I will deliver you, and*

you will glorify me.'

Christ asks him, *'what do you want me to do for you?' 'And the blind man said to him, "Rabbi, let me recover my sight."'*

'And Jesus said to him, "Go your way, your faith has made you well."'

'And immediately, he recovered his sight, and followed him on the way.'

Blind Bartimaeus would indeed follow Christ on His way, as He went to Israel, to Judea, to Jerusalem, to Zion. For He was not given sight for no reason. He was given sight that He may bear witness to something. To bear witness not to the shadow, but to the blood of the cross, of the only High Priest *who continues forever*; to witness the thing required.

Sight was given that we may see what is good. And a blind beggar saw Him whom alone was good, *as the only begotten of the Father, for who is good but God?*

Then let us see

what is good, and look upon the Word made flesh; let us taste of His body and blood, and rejoice and be glad. Let us triumph in His victory and sing songs of His justice. Let us do these things, for these are good. For seeing these good things, we will one day hear a good thing, being given both sight and sound, even as the beggar was. Yes, in the end of all things, we will hear a good thing, even from the darkness of a casket:

'Take heart. Get up. He is calling you.'

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Preached by Pastor Fields

Sermon Texts: Jeremiah 31:7-9; Hebrews 7:23-28; Mark 10:46-52.