

Sermon for the Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost

'The dead do not praise the Lord.'

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[Today we baptize a child. It is a baptism into Christ's life. And a baptism into his death.]

We do not like to think of death on days such as this, and yet that is what this sacrament signifies.

Death was hated in the times of the Bible not because it was an end of natural life, but because *the dead do not remember the Lord*. The end of memory, that was the sting of death.]

You do not remember what you ate yesterday for breakfast, for you are a forgetful generation. There is nothing more pleasing to the mind of we who sin than forgetfulness. What is more pleasing than not knowing? Ignorance is bliss. Ignorance of our own misery is bliss. Ignorance of our own shame is bliss. Ignorance of our own past is bliss. What greater fear is there, than to be reminded of *the sins of our youth*.

God granted *wine*, to gladden the hearts of men. Man conceived whiskey to numb the conscience of mankind.

How forgetful are we? We know not even our own forefathers. You know your parents; maybe know you well your grandparents? Perhaps, but your great grandparents? How far back does the line of your memory draw before it is cut off; before the memory of your lineage darkens to blackness; how far, before your ancestors are dead to you?

Think of all who are dead to you; all who, though they gave you life, yet you know not their name; they who are dead; those buried in the crypt of your mind, beneath unmarked earth, with not even an effaced stone by which to call upon their name.

'The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage', and as you have, you shall have children; but time shall devour; and your name shall be lost to the memory of the grandchildren and great grandchildren. You will no longer be a parent, but an assumption; you are only known to exist because you must have existed if the current age is to exist, and for no other reason.

'Teach us to number our days, O lord, that we might know wisdom.' For there is no greater wisdom than to know that the breath of our mouth and the beats of our heart are as numbered as the days of our life. These too shall cease.

Walk upon the dust of the ground as you leave this day, kick at the grass, gaze into the earth, the mother of flesh. Even *'from dust thou art'* so to this *'dust shalt thou return'*. With patience this earth awaits you, to devour you; for out of its generosity it grants you *daily bread*, but in its justice, it will demand of you *'the end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence.'*

On that day, O Christian, and I do not say this lightly, for the day of your death will be the day when you shall be called upon more than any other to be a Christian; on that day, close your eyes to this world, to this life, and *depart in peace*.

The world shall see you leave, your corpse shall be commended into the earth from whence it came, and you shall *descend into hell*. You shall be reckoned among the souls in Sheol.

Lost to the world of the living, you shall be in the realm of the dead. Yet, you, who are marked with the Cross, shall you weep? Shall you hide in terror? Will you lament as the lost? A cross is born in your breast, and him who you do not remember, him who is your father of whom you

keep no portrait, for he is forgotten to you, shall greet you. Abraham, in blessed silence shall receive you, the father of your great nation, the nation of Israel, the everlasting Church, the people of God.

Before him dwell the wretched faithful. [Before him dwell the children baptized. The child, of whom it is written *'from the mouths of babes.'*]

You shall consider yourself damned, and among the dead.
You cry out *'Where is your God?'*

The little child speaks to you: *'Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.'*
'Blessed is the name of the Lord forevermore.'

You shall say, 'but child, why do you continue to bless the Lord?'

And he shall say, *'The dead do not praise the Lord, nor do any go down in silence.* We who have fallen asleep are not dead, and our song shall hallow the halls of hell unto the end of this age; for Christ is our life, even as He has been the life of all the forgotten. For this our father Abraham, though he descended to dwell in this earth before his *offspring became as the sands of the shore* now gazes upward upon a Church more numerous than *the stars of the sky.*

This our father Isaac who was promised a land *flowing with milk and honey* in the world of his sojourning, though never receiving his inheritance in the brevity of his mortal life, has become an inheritor of the life of the world to come. This our father Jacob, who saw God face to face for but a moment, and died, now is called among us Israel, for *he shall see God.*

'For God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.' This is our baptism.

'Behold, a fire we have seen within a bush descend unto this now sacred ground. The consuming fire of our God, the God of our fathers, whom you have forgotten, but whom now you shall know forever. This fire is Christ. See how He calls out from the

bush from everlasting to everlasting '*I am that I am.*' And even as *He* is, we who once were, shall be forevermore, for we are in Him, and He is in us, even as you are in Him, and we are now in you, one communion, one Church, united to one God, awaiting one resurrection.

'For you, late born one, shall not be forgotten by Him, for even as '*he is remembered throughout all generations*', so are you remembered in Him who is life.

'Heed my words, for *from the mouths of babes has God established His strength.* Though you, even as I, were born of a mother, yet to die; you have been received into the earth, the mother of Adam, your first father. And yet no one is conceived in a mother that shall not be born of a mother; even as no one who is sown into the earth shall not be resurrected, for *except a seed fall into the earth and die, it remains alone, but if it dies, it grows into all godhood.*

Therefore, wait with us, new born one, of water and the word, with all your fathers, even Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; for we will pass before you. Remember us, even as we pass before you, for a hundred generations. For we are never dead to you; neither your ancient fathers; the ancient of the faith. For our God is *not the God of dead, but of the living.* Become wise, and remember your fathers, that you may teach your offspring the Gospel of life.

So shall the child speak. And the child's children will respond:

'Teacher, you have spoken well.'

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Preached by Pastor Fields

Sermon Texts: Exodus

3:1-15; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-8, 13-17; Luke 20; 27-40.