

A Sermon Preached by The Rev. James C. Ransom

*O God, you show us your powerful love in mercy and pity; Give us the grace to do the same through your Son, Jesus.
Amen.*

Since I have been camping out in Mays Chapel, I have taken advantage of early morning walks along the pedestrian trails that weave their way through the developments there. The paths were nice and clear until a few days ago, when after a cold snap, as if right on cue, the oaks dropped their acorns and the paths are now covered by treacherous nuts.

Oaks are among the most hopeful of trees. They drop their seeds just when winter begins, when all is darker and colder and frozen with death signs everywhere. But these are oaks, confident that now is the time to sow the seeds of a harvest that can only be months, perhaps years, away. They sow in profusion in the full knowledge that perhaps one in thousands will ever germinate and become an oak. They sow in profusion just when everyone else is hoarding the last from their gardens for the winter.

James believes that Christians should be like the oaks, showering their acorns on our cars like hail when we drive under them, and popping when we walk over them. Are you suffering? Great! That means we should shower you with prayer. Are you cheerful? Great! That means we can sing songs of praise to God! Are you sick? Cool! That means that Jim gets to anoint you with oil of healing and we can put you on the prayer list! Have you committed sins? Great! We have this great thing called confession! You can confess your sins and guess what? You can always get absolution! Have you strayed from the faith? Great! We know the way to Christ—we can show you the way. We can and should sow seeds of grace everywhere and in everyone, and at all times, even the most bleak. And we don't care who does it. As Moses says to Joshua, "Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit upon all the peoples of the earth."

Easy for you to say, Moses, but you have to admit it, we are like John, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us." We followed you, we took the course, we passed the test, we are certified Jesus commissioned exorcists! How does this guy get off invoking your Name with do-it-yourself exorcisms? Ya! That's us. I just hate it when Presbyterians think up some program that's better than ours, or when the Roman Catholics gloat because they always contribute the most Thanksgiving baskets every year. Or when a family says, "We're going to transfer to St. Swithens because they have a really good coffee hour, and their priest preaches short sermons.

Jesus has a remedy for this envy. "If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out; it is better to enter the Kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes to be thrown into hell." Now Jesus, there is only one problem here: this eye-plucking, hand-chopping, foot-cleaving remedy for sin could never work for me. The fact is, I have more sins than I have body parts. If all my offending parts were removed, there wouldn't be anything left to enter the Kingdom of God. I am like the knights in the Monty Python skit of the 2 knights in mortal combat who insist on fighting until there is nothing left of either of them except their talking helmets, and still they refuse to surrender. Such graphic foolishness is hell, where the fire of envy is never quenched.

Today we celebrate and hold fast to the abundance of God's Spirit poured over the Creation in and through Jesus. Poured over Samuel Lavin today in baptism, poured out through Ann Eder's ministry among us. We are today like silent and sturdy oaks; throwing acorns of love and forgiveness and healing and joy and prayer into the winter winds in such amazing abundance that we don't have time even to wonder whether what we do falls on stony ground or in fertile souls. We know God so clearly as abundant compassion and endless pity. May we have the grace to do the same. In the humble Spirit of Jesus.

Amen