

“ARE YOU GOOD WITHIN THE CITY?”

Responding to a distressed Abraham concerning the fate of Sodom, God declares, "If I find within the city of Sodom fifty innocent ones, I will forgive the whole place for their sake (Gen. 18:26)."

Why "within the city?" Because real goodness is not practiced in seclusion. The man on the mountaintop may not do wrong, but also does no real good in the absence of another human being. "Within the city" is found both the certainty of moral failure, and promise of moral growth.

There is a temptation, increasing in our world, to shut the door on others. Technology makes available the opportunities for separation: money comes through a machine, food can be delivered, company provided by a television or computer screen. But such separation robs us of the potential for goodness, the action of a human being against the background of the friction. As Emerson wrote: "In my study my faith is perfect."

The testing ground of character is at work, in synagogue, in the street -- in the parking lot. God's question of Sodom is the question of modern life as well: how many have faith while in the marketplace? Is there goodness within the city?