

Matthew 5:21-37 - "Both the Law and Gospel = God's Love"

Pr. Kurt A. Van Fossan - Epiphany 6A 2023

Today's Gospel reading is part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount which began in much the same way as today's Divine Service. Jesus' said, at the beginning of His Sermon on the Mount, "*Blessed are the poor in spirit*" (Matthew 5:3). And at the beginning of our service we confessed, by the grace of God, that we are "*poor in spirit*" because "we have sinned against [God] in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone."

But the main part of our God-given faith that brings us here today is the part that also believes in God's promises through Jesus Christ—the Good News that Jesus was crucified for our sins instead of us, and rose from the dead to give us the Good News (which we heard in the absolution), "*I forgive you all your sins.*" These are God our Savior's words which He called me to speak to you and me in His place.

Through this Good News our Lord assures us, as He assured the people at the beginning of His Sermon on the Mount, that "*the kingdom of heaven*" is ours. "*Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*"

After giving us this Good News at the beginning of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, and this Divine Service, God knows that His work is not over. For He knows the struggles we continue to face because of our sinful nature and the sinful world around us which always tries to corrupt the good things He gives us.

The most common way our sinful nature seeks to corrupt God's free gift of salvation through Jesus Christ is to convince us that it's not free—that we had or have something to do with it—that God has given us faith in Jesus because we're doing a better job of living according to God's commandments than others. This, of course, is not true. Therefore, Jesus continues in our text to remind us that apart from Him and His undeserved gift of forgiveness, we continue to be just as sinful as those we consider to be the worst of sinners.

How many of you, in your confession of sins at the beginning of the service, consciously confessed the sin of murder or adultery which you committed this past week? In our thoughts we often mix together the teachings of God with the teachings of man. Yes, I confess that I'm not perfect, but thankfully I'm not as bad as a lot of other people in this world who are guilty of things like murder and adultery!

Such thoughts tend to make us think of God's forgiveness as a well-deserved pat on the back for not being as bad as others. So, Jesus, in our text, sets the record straight when it comes to our sins and His salvation. Instead of relaxing or watering down the Law, Jesus digs deeper into the meaning and purpose of the Law. The Ten Commandments are not DIY tools that God gives us so we can fix ourselves and get back into God's good book. One of the main purposes of God's Law is to show us that we are sinners who are unable to fix ourselves.

It's not only physically murdering someone that makes a person deserving of God's judgement of eternal death. Jesus says that "*everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgement.*" It's not only having sex with someone outside of marriage that makes us adulterers. Jesus says that "*everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*"

The same is true with all sin. The problem originates not with our physical eyes or hands, but spiritually in our sinful heart. Hopefully God, through His Word, helps us to see that before we start cutting off the parts of our bodies, since even blind people, or people with no hands still sin.

But our sinful nature and our need for a Savior is not the only thing Jesus wants us to see. He also wants us to see the Gospel—the Good News that He is our gracious, merciful, forgiving and loving Savior.

Where's the Gospel of God's love and salvation in our Gospel reading? It's in the fact that Jesus, who spoke these words of Law (which condemns us all), is the Son of God who became flesh and blood so that He could save us through His damning death on the cross, the condemnation we deserve, in our place. But unlike us, He is also God who is able to rise from the dead in victory over our sins, death, and the devil to give us new and eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior.

God works through these two main teachings of the Bible, the Law which shows us that we are sinners in need of a Savior, and the Gospel which shows us our Savior, Jesus Christ, to create and sustain our saving faith in Him, now and forever in "*the kingdom of heaven.*"

All glory be to God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

[Children's Sermon] In our Epistle reading for today we heard about St. Paul disciplining some adults because they were acting like little children who sometimes fight with other children when they don't get their way.

How many of you, when you do something wrong (like fighting with your brother or sister) are disciplined by your parents? How many of you like to be disciplined by your parents? None of us like it.

But, when your parents discipline you because of your bad behavior, does that mean your parents don't love you? No, just the opposite. They have always loved you. And it's because they love you that they, like God, discipline you when you do something wrong, in hopes that you will see your wrong behavior, and say you're sorry. Then your parents forgive you, as God forgives them when they ask for to be forgiven whenever they do something wrong. No doubt your parents also, like God, remind you again and again that they love you.

In the Bible, God says: "*My child, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of His correction, for the Lord corrects those He loves, as a father the son [or daughter] in whom he delights*" (Proverbs 3:11-12).

How much does God love you? Jesus, who is God, shows us how much He love us by allowing Himself to be punishment for our sins when He died on a cross, so that we can be forgiven and look forward to meeting Jesus not as our condemning Judge, but as our loving Savior; because, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so."