

Matthew 5:17-26 Forgiving Righteousness

Last week the Gospel Lesson featured the calling of the first disciples. We were reminded that the Word of God was put in the mouth of the disciples and written down so that we could also receive it and speak His Word to others. This week we learn about the life of the disciple: Jesus fulfills the Law and the Prophets. Jesus' forgiveness flows through us to our neighbor.

Some folks have the idea that Jesus softened up the Law. This is the falsehood people spread when they say, "Jesus never said anything about homosexuality." Jesus is the Second Person of the Trinity. In the Old Testament, the Second Person of the Trinity is identified as LORD—with all capital letters. Jesus' teaching on the Commandments is a continuation and deepening of what He said in Leviticus.

Jesus tells us in Matthew, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law and the Prophets." People were watching Jesus. They noticed that Jesus was hanging around thieves and prostitutes and even having table fellowship with them. Jesus never sinned with sinners. He ate with them to give them repentance.

The rules Jesus broke were not God's rules. The Pharisees came up with the idea that Moses came down from the mountain with two sets of law: The Ten Commandments and the "oral law." The oral law was man-made rules about how to live so that you stayed away from breaking a commandment. Like how many steps you could take outside of your house on the Sabbath. But the Commandments teach you that you already are a lawbreaker before you even get started trying.

Jesus says, "You have heard it said, 'You shall not murder.' But I say to you that anyone who carries anger in his heart against his brother is guilty of murder." And when Jesus gets right down to it, He wants you to recognize that His forgiving your sins means that you get to make haste to forgive those who sin against you—even if you didn't start it, if you remember your brother has

something against you, drop what you're doing and go be reconciled.

Be reconciled before Judgment Day because refusing to forgive shows that you despise the forgiveness Jesus earned for you on the cross. Don't come to the Communion rail refusing to pass along the forgiveness Jesus is here to give you. Putting a kink in the forgiveness hose stops forgiveness from coming to you. Refusing to forgive is not a life of faith in Jesus.

Jesus also reminds us that the Law is not just for "those people out there"—you know, the tax collectors and sinners, the ones who are out to uproot Judeo-Christian guardrails. See, the Pharisees were very good at keeping an eye on what others were doing to make sure they were toeing the line; and they were very proud of how good they themselves were.

No, if your righteousness is no better than that, you have no hope of entering the kingdom of heaven. You would have no standing before God. The Kingdom of heaven is the forgiveness of sin. Refusing to repent of the log in your own eye while you try to remove the speck from your neighbor's eye will not get you into the Kingdom of heaven.

Nor is the Law bad because it shows our shortcomings. The Law is good because it shows us our lack and shows us our need for one who can fulfill it. The Law shows us our need for a Substitute who has a righteousness beyond our own.

That Substitute is Jesus. His mercy toward those who are slaves to sin is demonstrated in our Old Testament Lesson. Yes, in the giving of the Commandments, the LORD points out His intention that we keep ourselves only for Him. He is a jealous God who will not share His glory with a god of our choosing.

But the foundation of the Commandments is God identifying Himself and His saving action of mercy: "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."

The LORD redeemed Israel with an arm that stretched out and took the life of the firstborn of

every family in Egypt. Only those families covered by the blood of a lamb were spared. The firstborn was the substitute pointing forward to the LORD's substitutionary redemption on the cross.

Jesus fulfilled the law of love for God by obediently going to the cross to suffer the Father's wrath against our sin. Jesus fulfilled the law of love for neighbor by paying for your sin, redeeming you from slavery to sin, death and the devil and giving you forgiveness and His standing before the Father.

That's what the Prophets were given to point to: The Suffering Servant who would crush the serpent's head. Jesus is the fulfiller of the Psalmist's description in our Introit: "The LORD is the strength of his people; he is the saving refuge of his anointed." Jesus was anointed your Savior in His Baptism. He is the Shepherd who laid down His life for us and took it up again to carry you forever. He is your rock who hears your prayers and speaks peace to you in the midst of the chaos. The LORD is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped."

So how do we live in this world? Paul asks, should we go on sinning so that grace may abound? Well, it would be beyond silly that we who have been saved would want to continue in sin.

Baptized into Christ, you have Jesus' identity as a righteous one, with standing before the Father, standing to go love your neighbor with the Father's mercy.

Baptized into Christ's death on the cross, the sin He condemned in His body is condemned in ours. We have a new nature which prays for our neighbor, goes to our neighbor in their time of need simply because Jesus has come to us in our need and raised us up away from our self to serve others.

We want what God wants. Your sin which trips you up is released from you. Your imagination is cleansed and made holy. Your patience is restored. Your mouth is cleansed to speak God's word of life in Jesus.

Our community is mourning the death of a friend and high school graduate. We get to come alongside those who knew Hallie and listen to their lament. We get to grieve in the hope Jesus gives us because He has risen from the dead. Jesus' resurrection gives us endurance when tragedy strikes. His grace makes us ready to serve others who are hurting.

We are no longer slaves to serving our self. Death has no dominion over us. Baptized into Christ, we live a new life of service to others, pouring out the reconciliation that has been poured out on us.

God gives you the privilege to reckon yourself dead to sin and alive to God through faith in Christ. That's how the Father reckons you. That reckoning is the strength of the newness of life that you have been given in Christ. Amen.