

February 12, 2023, Sermon

Matthew 5:21-37

Mosaic Law 2.0

Lord, give me the confidence in the power of your Gospel. Grant me clarity in understanding and proclaiming the truths of your Word.

Good Morning to all present, and a shout out to those participating in today's worship from home.

This week's reading follows the Beatitudes to form the Sermon on the Mount. In today's reading, Jesus takes known Mosaic Law, but raises the stakes and instructs in the demands of leading a righteous life according to his teachings. It is Mosaic Law, 2.0. For those of you not familiar with tech terms, 2.0 is an adjective to denote a superior or more advanced version of an original concept.

Throughout this reading Jesus says, "You have heard that it was said..." and He follows this with, "But I say to you..." Jesus is not rewriting the laws, but extending them, internalizing them, so that not only behaviors but attitudes and emotions fall within its scope. It is easy to understand that one cannot commit murder. It is another thing to avoid anger in one's heart. Jesus' path to salvation is not just following a set of rules of what NOT to do, but it is a commitment to surrender oneself to the love of God and neighbor. This is active love, not just a passive following of the rules.

Jesus understands human nature and the power of our thoughts and emotions and how they help or hinder our living a righteous life.

There is a powerful interplay between our thoughts, intentions, and actions. Our thoughts shape our intentions, which in turn drive our actions, and together they make up the sum of our lives. Jesus demands us to be careful and mindful of what we allow to take root in our thoughts, for it is these thoughts that give birth to our intentions.

Intentions are the motivations behind our actions, and they can either be driven by love and compassion or by fear, hurt or self-interest. When our intentions are driven by love, we seek to do good in the world and to help others. When our intentions are driven by fear, hurt or self-interest, we seek to protect ourselves and to gain an advantage over others.

Our thoughts, intentions, and actions are interwoven. They have the power to shape our lives and the world around us. To truly follow Jesus, we need to cultivate thoughts of love and compassion, to nurture intentions that are driven by love, and to take actions that reflect that love. This is the true meaning of the commandments given by God and articulated by Christ.

In today's Gospel, Jesus also teaches us about the importance of being reconciled to those we have wronged, or to those who have wronged us. He says that if we are offering our gift at the Altar and remember that someone has something against us, we should leave our gift there in front of the altar and go and be reconciled to that person first. This is, again, a powerful reminder that our relationship with God is intimately connected to our relationship with one another. We cannot truly love and serve God while harboring resentment and anger toward others.

Again, this is active love, not simply living according to a list of things not to do. This active love is also behind the beatitudes. "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth." Meekness is not weakness, but rather it is the ability to control one's anger and desires, and to submit to God's will. Those who are meek will inherit the earth because they will be in a right relationship with God and will be able to enjoy all that He

has created. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." Purity of heart is not only about avoiding sin, but having a heart that seeks after God and His righteousness. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." Peacemakers are not just those who avoid conflict, but rather those who actively work to bring peace and reconciliation between individuals and communities. They will be called children of God; because they reflect the character of God, bringing glory to His name.

I am sure we can all remember a time, or many times when, for whatever reason, be it a personal slight or competition at work, we were at odds with someone. We are all predisposed to this as we are all human. We need to work through these feelings to understand their true nature, which usually has to do more with us than the person we are at odds with. Diffusing these feelings makes one happier as it reduces stress and minimizes negativity. This requires our connecting with our perceived adversaries, engaging in conversations, and non-judgmental listening. This will open us up to reconciliation, a lightness of being. We will be more predisposed to how Jesus requires us to live. Jesus sounds stern in today's Gospel, but his definition of a righteous life really is a life that leads to contentment, happiness, and a fuller enjoyment of life.

True righteousness is not only about external actions or keeping a set of rules. It is about having a heart that is transformed by God's love and grace. It is about active love, seeking after God, and loving others. It calls us to a higher standard of living, one that is rooted in love and grace.

This is a challenge as it is easier to live by lists of rules and laws than to live an authentic, dynamic, and redemptive relationship with people. And, while laws can be static and arbitrary, Jesus reaches into these laws to reveal their true objective: the value and protection of other, ALL others.

Let us examine our hearts and ask ourselves, are we living according to the principles Jesus taught us in the Sermon on the Mount? Are we actively pursuing righteousness and living out the teachings of Jesus in our daily lives?

As we approach Valentine's Day, let us begin a love affair...with mankind.

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