

The Sixth Sunday after Trinity, A ✕ D 2009

Matthew 5:17-26 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹ Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰ For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. ²¹ "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' ²² But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire. ²³ So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. ²⁵ Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. ²⁶ Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

In the name of the Father and of the ✕ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

1 What to do with Jesus? He's an historical figure; no one doubts His existence.

Those who don't believe Him to be the Second Person of the Holy Trinity who took human flesh lived, died, and rose to save men from their sins must come up with another conclusion. More often than not, Jesus becomes a good teacher, someone who taught and exhibited the right way to live. But Jesus won't let you get away with that. Not in His Sermon on the Mount, anyway, from which comes today's Gospel reading. Here's what the One many people presume to be merely a good teacher has to teach: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does

them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

2 The Ten Commandments, Jesus says, are just as applicable, just as meaningful, today as they were when God delivered them to Moses. Whoever relaxes one of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called the least in the kingdom of heaven. That is, he will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Jesus doesn't relax the law, like the scribes and Pharisees did. He doesn't turn the commandments into easy-to-keep rules. In fact, He does quite the opposite in the Sermon on the Mount. No fewer than five times in this sermon does Jesus tell the crowd, “You have heard it said...but I say to you.” Each time, Jesus explains the commandments not as mere outward rules, but as standards for thoughts as well as actions.

3 “You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire.” So Jesus preached on the fifth commandment, which the Pharisees and scribes likely thought was one of the easiest to keep. Don't off anybody today, and you should be fine. But the commandment is about more than keeping your hands from shedding blood. “We should fear and love God so that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body, but help and defend him in every physical need.” You break this commandment, Jesus says, equally by pulling the trigger or by harboring anger, as much by brandishing the blade as by wielding the tongue. If you refuse to be reconciled to a brother, God will

refuse to be reconciled to you. If your mouth is mute to speak an apology, your ears deaf to hear one, your hands lame to repair a relationship, you can be sure your prayers and praise will fall on the Lord's deaf ears, and your gifts will meet against His closed hands. You break this commandment whenever you place your own needs over the needs of others, whenever you ignore their needs altogether, when you care more about your own body and life than the body and life of those you encounter.

4 This good teacher needs to get with the times, it seems. Maybe the Incarnate Word of God needs to be told not to put a period where God has put a comma, or He should be reminded that God is still speaking. Those who huck such phrases use them to say that God has relaxed his standards of virtue, that He has redefined vice more narrowly than previously, and that He is redoing His image from One who hates sin to One who loves you just the way you are. You can't believe Jesus is merely a good teacher and that He spoke the words in today's Gospel pericope. This is not good teaching. It's crushing Law. Repent.

5 Anyone whose righteousness does not exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees, the well-known do-gooders of the day, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. The Ten Commandments are all the righteous works necessary for you to do, all the time, if you hope to have enough good works to get into heaven. God is not like Lady Justice; He has no scales. Any evil outweighs a lifetime of good works. Nor is He blind; He sees better than you do, straight into your heart and mind. These, like your actions, must be righteous beyond fault to enter the kingdom of heaven.

6 If you only have little sins, you only need a little savior, someone, perhaps, like a good teacher, to show you how to improve your lot. But your sins are not little. That's

what Jesus makes clear in this Sermon on the Mount. He's as much a mere good teacher as He is a little savior. He doesn't abolish the Law. He fulfills it. God did not give you His commandments and also make you able to keep them. He gives you the commandments, the Law, and does not abolish it, so that you would need Jesus to fulfill the Law for you. This He did. He who knew no sin, Jesus Christ, became sin for you. The sinless Son of God took human flesh in order to take upon Himself all of human sinfulness. Every sin that has been or will be committed Jesus bore on His body on the cross. And He died for them all.

7 The only way your righteousness will surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees, the only way your righteousness will match the perfection the Law requires of you, is if Jesus gives you His righteousness. And that's what He has done. As the Apostle says, "we know that our old self was crucified with Him [in Baptism] in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin." Your sin belongs to Jesus. His righteousness, the perfect righteousness that fulfilled the Law, belongs to you, who have been joined into His death and resurrection in the waters of Holy Baptism.

8 Those unwilling to be reconciled to those with whom they have disagreements or conflicts must heed the Lord Jesus' word and depart from His altar and first be reconciled to your brother. But those who desire reconciliation and yet cannot manufacture it, who want to be rid of anger, insult, and malice and yet cannot escape, here at His altar, Jesus gives you not only His Body and Blood, but He uses these to deliver to you forgiveness of sins, His very righteousness, and the freedom from past sins and grievances. You who hunger and thirst for revenge and retribution will find in

the Lord's Supper condemnation. But you who hunger and thirst for righteousness find in this meal precisely what you hunger for: the Body and Blood of the only Righteous One. His righteousness is yours. Take and eat. Take and drink.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria
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