

The Sixth Sunday after Trinity Sunday

St. Matthew 5:20-26

July 23rd, 2017

Sts. Peter & Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC

Greenville, SC

Pastor Jerald Dulas

First Be Reconciled to Your Brother

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

The keeping of the Law of God is not done just through external acts. It is not enough to say, "I have never physically taken someone's life; therefore, I have not broken the Fifth Commandment." Our Lord + Jesus, Who is the perfect fulfiller of the Law, teaches us that obedience to the Law and will of God involves the heart, that is to say, the keeping of the Law is an internal act. For as we have been taught in catechesis, we sin in our thoughts, in our words, and our deeds. We can break the commandments in what we say, think or do. Our minds, our tongues and our hands can be used to break the commandments.

This is why all the commandments begin with the word, "You." Take for example the commandments that is especially put before us today by our Lord + Jesus, "You shall not murder." Most people concentrate on the murder part of the commandment. But, the first word is "you." And when we hear that word we have a tendency to think outside of ourselves; at our neighbor. "You, my neighbor" shall not murder. The commandments begin with the word "You" because they want to impress upon you that the keeping of the commandments involves the whole you. You are to not sin with not only your hands, but your whole you; your lips, your mind, all of your five senses, and especially in your heart.

This makes the keeping of the Law and the commandments of God a scary thing; at least it should. For, when we realize how strict the demands of the Law are, we should shudder in fear even if for a moment. For, what does our Lord + Jesus say? "Unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the Kingdom of Heaven." From all outward appearances, the scribes and the Pharisees were the perfect picture of keeping the Law. But, not even their righteousness was good enough in the eyes of God the Father. They still lacked one thing: their hearts were far from God.

This is what our Lord + Jesus is saying when He states that our righteousness should exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, it means that our righteousness should go all the way into our hearts. Our hearts are the seat of all evil. With our hearts, we kill our neighbor with more than just our hands. We kill him when we are angry and hateful toward him. We kill him when we say to him, "Raca," that is, when we behave toward him in a hostile and belligerent way. We kill him when we call him a "fool," that is, when we strike our neighbor with slanderous and insulting words. We can kill our neighbor in more ways than just by physically murdering him.

And this is just the ways in which we can do harm to our neighbor. We also kill our neighbor when we do nothing to save him. A few weeks ago, we heard the Gospel of the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man killed Lazarus when he allowed Lazarus to sit at his gate starving and begging for the scraps that fell from his table. If the rich man truly kept the Fifth Commandment, he would have provided food for Lazarus out of his abundance. But he did not. This is why the Lord God gives you all the things that He gives you to support this body and life, especially when we have more than we can use. He intends that you use it to help your brother and neighbor, all those whom God has placed in your way to assist with the goods that He has given you. When we are not using our gifts to help our neighbor, we are also breaking the Fifth Commandment and not just when we are hurling insults at him.

This is an important point. When we ask, "Who is your neighbor?" The answer is "everyone." However, not everyone has been put before you as someone who you can assist with the gifts God has given you. There are people on other continents and countries I have never met, and will probably never meet, so how can I help them? But, there are plenty of people I run into on a daily basis who I do have opportunity to help. The same is true for you. Help the people God has placed into your lives, first and foremost. Just like Lazarus was put in the rich man's life, but he did nothing to save him.

However, even though we should do these things for our neighbors, we should never think that we merit God's grace and mercy from them. We do not receive salvation from keeping the commandments. We are not made righteous, nor do we possess righteousness when we keep the commandments. Remember, the keeping of the commandments involves the heart. And our hearts will never be righteous enough to merit salvation.

This is what our Lord is getting at in the second half of today's Gospel, when He is talking about being reconciled to your brother before offering your gift. The Israelites were incorrectly taught that if they brought a sacrifice to the priest, and the priest offered it, then their sins would be forgiven. But, as we learn in Holy Scripture, God is not impressed with outward acts of sacrifice. He desires mercy, above sacrifice. In other words, He wants our hearts to be involved. The Israelites who did not involve their heart were making useless sacrifices. Our Lord + Jesus instructs His disciples that when the heart is involved it will realize that simply going through the motions does not bring salvation to him. He must first be reconciled to his brother, because simply offering the sacrifice is not going to reconcile his brother to him.

Our hearts should be inclined to helping our neighbor in his bodily needs. And when we fail, for we are going to fail—repeatedly—our hearts should turn to the One Whose righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, our Lord + Jesus Christ. In Him we find forgiveness for our sins, both the sins we commit and the sins we have failed to accomplish.

In our Holy Baptisms, we were clothed with the righteousness of Christ. His works were wrapped around us like a new white garment. When our heavenly Father looks at our works He only sees His Son + Jesus and His works, which He accomplished for our salvation. Therefore, when we sin, when we fail in our own righteousness, we can turn to our Holy Baptism and remember that we are clothed with the righteousness of Christ. We bear His works and His merits. They more than exceed the scribes and the Pharisees, for His works are perfect. Therefore, if His works are perfect, we being clothed with His righteousness, then our works are perfect in God's eyes.

We apprehend this gift with our hearts, through faith. Whenever we remember that we are baptized, as we do at the beginning of every Divine Service when we remember the holy Name placed upon us at our Holy Baptisms, we are remembering that we are clothed with the righteousness of our dear Lord + Jesus. Our Lord knows our weakness so well that He even gifts us with the faith we need to believe on Him. The Holy Ghost implanted this faith in us at our Holy Baptisms, and He continues to nurture our faith through His Word and through our participation in the means of grace. He gives us the

faith to cling to our Lord + Jesus Christ's righteousness, when we fail in our own righteousness and keeping of the Law. It is this knowledge and this faith which instills in us love for Him and for our neighbor. This love is even strengthened further when we participate in the Blessed Sacraments. We even pray it in the Post-Communion Collect that our Lord God would grant us fervent love for Him and fervent love for one another, so that we may learn to love and serve our neighbor in his every physical need, and not hurt nor harm his person.

May God grant us the strength to daily help our neighbor in every physical need, and also help us to not hate him, or be hostile toward him, or insult him. And when we fail, may the Lord lead us to remember that we are clothed with His righteousness, so that we may ask forgiveness from our brother whom we have offended, and rejoice that our salvation is found not in our actions or inactions, but in our hearts directed toward our Lord's perfect righteousness. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory! I will extol Thee, O Lord, and I will praise Thy Name forever and ever. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.