

“You shall not Murder...”

Matthew 5:21-26

Oct. 14, 2018

I am a murderer. I am a murderer. Now before you whip out your phone to start posting this on social media, please understand that I have not ever killed anyone in a legal sense, but I have broken the sixth commandment, which says “You shall not murder...” Let me explain what I mean this morning as we continue our sermon series on the ten commandments.

As we have talked about before, the ten commandments are actually split into two groups-the first four, which have to do with our relationship with God, and show us how to love the Lord our God. The remaining six have to do with our relationships with each other, and as Jesus put it, to how we love our neighbor as we love ourselves. Last week, we looked at the commandment to honor our parents, and our commandment for this week is actually one of the two shortest of all the commandments, “You shall not murder.” God makes it clear throughout the whole Bible that it is not acceptable before God to kill other human beings, for every human being is made in the image of God.

It is ironic of course to read this commandment in light of the previous hundred or so years in our world since the start of World War I in 1914-it is a period which has seen so much killing of one another. I was listening once to a talk show that had a war journalist on, who had reported from many different violent conflicts. He noted that over the past century since the beginning of World War I, there have been approximately 90 wars fought in our world, with 115 million people killed. He actually wrote a book called “Prisoner of War” which has as its major thesis that war is a thrill for some people in this world. Many people who serve in either armies or guerrilla movements get addicted to the adrenaline rush of war, and the thrill of killing, as strange as that may sound. We don’t just see this reality on the battleground though-we can see it on the streets and in the houses of our own country, where the rate of violent deaths is twenty times that of what happens in European countries and forty times that of Japan. Obviously there are some people in this country who take some pleasure in killing, in breaking the sixth commandment before God. One caller into the talk show said that there are only two species in the world that kill other members of their own species. One is ourselves, and the other is rats. A sobering thought.

Well, you may be thinking to yourself, it is a crazy world out there, isn’t it Pastor Paul? There are just a lot of evil people. But hey, thank God, I’ve never killed anyone-I’m a good person. Surely I am free and clear on this commandment. Well, maybe not. In the passage we just heard from Luke today, Jesus comments on the meaning of this sixth commandment in what we call the Sermon on the Mount. He says to a crowd gathered on a hillside by the Sea of Galilee, “You’re familiar with the command to the ancients, ‘Do not murder.’ But I’m telling you that anyone who is so much as angry with a brother or sister is guilty of murder.” Pretty strong words, aren’t they? Jesus says to you and me that even if there is no dead body in sight, if you have a major league resentment towards another person stored in your heart, then it is as if you are guilty of murder.

Now let me be clear that Jesus is not just talking about a temporary flash of anger here, such as when somebody cuts you off in the line at the supermarket, where you get angry for a moment but then forget about it shortly thereafter. Jesus is talking about the kind of anger that is settled, that has

wrapped itself around your soul, where the roots have gone deep into your very being. Whether you are consciously thinking about that person or not, the anger remains within you, bubbling under the surface. You hate that person and what they stand for. You wish them ill in a strong way, whether you have ever acted on it or not. If you are angry with someone in this sense, that is when Jesus says that it is as if you have murdered that person.

Then Jesus intensifies the commandment further. He says, “anyone who insults their brother or sister is answerable before the Council. Whoever says ‘you fool’ to another is liable to the fires of hell.” Now this also sounds a little strong to us at first, but we need to recognize that this term, “you fool”, meant something a little different in Jesus’ time than it does today. After all, calling somebody a fool today really isn’t that big of a deal. But in Bible times, it was a very derogatory statement, something that really was abusive towards the other person.

In trying to think of contemporary equivalents, I thought of “bitch” and “bastard”. These words each have very ordinary meanings; you could conceivably use them in a sentence with no anger behind it to mean a female dog or an illegitimate child. But most of the time, as we all know, they are used in much harsher language to hurt and tear and put down someone else. What Jesus is saying here is that if you use words like this in an unjustifiable way, if you are seeking to destroy others out of your own unwarranted anger, then this is a very grave matter before God, a sin of the same type, though of a lesser degree, than murder. One day we will all have to answer for the times we have spoken in these ways before the Council, Jesus says. Now the Council was the highest court for Jews, and Jesus is using this word metaphorically as an analogy for God. He is saying that someday each of us will have to answer for our actions in this life to the highest court conceivable, the Supreme Court of courts, God’s court.

So it is important it is that we repent of our anger and bitterness towards others before God. Jesus said, “When you offer your gift to God at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.” In other words, Jesus says, when you have caused pain in the life of another, or when your bitterness towards someone else is destroying your own life, don’t just feel bad about it, do something. When you know you have caused someone else pain, seek them out, and try to make things right, as best as you are able. Even if you are in church here on a Sunday morning and are about to offer your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go, first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. Now it is not always possible to do that in this broken world as we all know, but the key point of what Jesus is saying is not to just react to things, but to be pro-active before God in seeking reconciliation in our relationships.

And to really honor the point of this commandment, don’t just seek to heal your own personal relationships with others, but try to bring about reconciliation in our world and show God’s love, especially to those in need. That was basically the point the great Protestant reformer Martin Luther made when he was commenting on this commandment. He said “This commandment is violated not only when a person actually does evil, but also when he fails to do good to his neighbor. If you send a person away naked when you could have clothed him, you have let him freeze to death. If you see anyone suffering from hunger and do not feed him, you have let him starve. Likewise, if you see anyone condemned to death or in similar peril and do not save him, although you know ways and means to do

so, you have killed him. Therefore, God rightly calls all persons murderers who do not offer counsel and aid to people in need and in peril of body and life.”

You can probably see now why I called myself a murderer at the beginning of this sermon. I am well aware that even though I have not physically killed anyone in my life, I have hurt some people deeply with my actions and words. I have held great bitterness towards others in my heart. I have not always sought as I should to aid those who are in need physically and spiritually in our world. Perhaps you might be able to say the same things about yourself. In the end, the sixth commandment, like all the others, drives us to realize that we are not as good before God as we sometimes like to think that we are. We are in need of forgiveness and a Savior.

And in the end, I think the sixth commandment also urges us to have a reverence for life. Life is a precious gift! Instead of killing, let us seek to help people and things to live. Instead of holding anger and bitterness towards one another, let us seek to speak the truth to one another, but then to forgive, as God has so richly forgiven us in Jesus Christ. Instead of insulting one another, let us seek to build one another up, and to encourage one another to enjoy the life that God has so richly given each one of us. I think Jesus provides such a wonderful model for us of what it truly means to have reverence for life. The book of Hebrews tells us that He was filled with more joy in His life than any of His companions. He loved to laugh and to joke, to attend parties and weddings. He knew the joy of life. He sought to encourage others when it was appropriate, urging them to use their gifts and talents before God. And yet He also knew when it was time to confront another, not in a bitter way, but in a truthful way, reminding them that their spiritual life was at stake before God. May you and I seek to have the same reverence for life in our own lives, as we try to walk in the name of the One who has given us the gift of life, now and eternally, Jesus Christ.

So let us now come together for a time of healing, as we do once every couple of months or so. This will actually be my last time of doing a time of healing with you as a congregation. They have been some of my most memorable and meaningful moments in our worship together. I am so grateful for the powerful ways that God has been at work in our midst in these times of healing over the years, healing emotional pain, bringing about physical healing, helping us forgive and accept forgiveness. And so now today may this time of healing be a time of restoring life for you—a time of joy, a time of hope, and a time to forgive yourself and others. May God receive the glory, Amen.