

Sermon for Trinity 6 – Matthew 5:20-26

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

Our Lord preached to His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount: “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder ...’” And we as Christians can be glad that this commandment and the others of the Ten Commandments are not just said to those of old, but are still said to us today. In fact, the Old Testament reading for today is just that – the Ten Commandments.

Who commanded these Ten Commandments? We know the answer to that. Moses says, “And God spoke all these words, ‘I am the Lord your God ... You have seen that I have spoken to you from heaven.’” So before giving the Ten Commandments, God gave His name: “I am the Lord your God.” In so doing, He gave us something to think about. He is the God who acted on behalf of His people. He brought the Israelites out Egypt. He accompanied them in the desert, even though they tested Him.

This God, His Word stands. It’s as if He said, “God’s commandments are no mere sounds. They are not like our words that are gone as a breath. These are the words of the Almighty God. Keep these laws and you will have a faithful and almighty Lord as your helper. Despise them; ignore them, and you will find a mighty wrathful God. He is our Lord and Maker: we are obliged to obey Him or face pain and damnation. He is our God who created and preserves us. Every vessel and drop of blood in our body came from His Hand. We have life and limb by His grace. Therefore we are to be wholly devoted to Him in all that we think, in all that we say, and in all that we do.”

Indeed, our God is a jealous God who will not be messed with. He punishes the wicked to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Him. At the same time, He promises to do good to those who love him, even to the thousandth generation. From this we see that God delights in doing good to mankind, more than showing His wrath. He shows grace to a thousand generations, but can’t continue His wrath beyond four.

God lists His Ten Commandments. God keeps it short and sweet, preaching more wisdom in a couple minutes than we could say in ten years—indeed, a whole lifetime. Jesus affirms the Ten Commandments in His preaching. True, our Lord is a preacher of grace, but we must not take this to mean that He has nothing to do with the Law. Indeed, He will on the Last Day come to judge the living and the dead. Those who have willfully sinned against the Ten Commandments and have not repented will be condemned. So our Lord skillfully summarizes these Ten Commandments in two sentences: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind; this is the chief and greatest commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments all the Law and the Prophets depend ... 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.” It’s obvious that our Lord in no way wanted the Ten Commandments forgotten, but instead upheld and heard. Why? He explained the Law so that the sweetness of His grace might be all the more clear to us. From the Law comes the knowledge of our wretchedness and sin. But this is not the end. This is not the last word. Next Christ brings the comforting news of the Gospel from the heart of our Heavenly Father so that we do not despair.

So what does our Lord say to us today? In the Sermon on the Mount, when Christ speaks of the Ten Commandments, He scours the well of our heart. If our heart is clean in thoughts, words, actions, than good works will come out of it. If our heart is wicked, sin and evil will spew out of it. The heart is God’s temple and throne. God wishes to rule there alone and to direct every thought, word, and deed to His own glory. The heart is to fear, love, and trust in God above all things. We are to reject all other gods, not just the explicit and obvious ones like Buddha and Vishnu, but also the implicit kind of gods: money, security, relationships, ourselves, and anything else in which we put our trust other than God alone.

God's third commandment reminds us that our bodies should rest so that our souls can receive. Did you ever notice that "Remember the Sabbath day" is the only commandment that has the word "remember" in it? God knew we would forget that we need to take time to receive His grace. This is for all employees, too: Our Lord shed His blood for them no less than He did for employers. The worship day is not a sin-day, but our day of reconciliation with God. God speaks His light into our sadness and despair as He did on the first day. Every time of worship is a "Let there be light" declaration spoken right to the darkness of our heart. The Lord speaks His "Peace be with you" here when our heart is anxious. We are clothed with power from on high when we receive His Word and Sacraments in worship.

The Sixth Commandment. Whether you're married or not married, conduct yourself in the pure and innocent way in thoughts, words, and deeds. The Eighth Commandment. Hate lying. Love the truth. Love honesty. Build up and do not tear down your neighbor's reputation and good name.

In the Gospel reading for today, our Lord especially wants us to hear and heed the Fifth Commandment. "You shall not murder." What does this mean? "We should fear and love God so that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body, but help and support him in every physical need." Christ said, "Everyone who is angry with brother will be liable to judgement, everyone who insults his brother will be liable to the hell of fire." The Lord cuts to the heart. We are not to use our mind to hold a grudge against our neighbor. Thoughts are not exempt. When they go against God's Word they incur the debt of hellfire and eternal damnation. We are not use our mouth to disparage or mock our neighbor. We are not to use our hand to hurt him. Rather, we are to be patient, gentle, and merciful.

Do you hate anyone? Are you angry with somebody? Are you holding a grudge? Are you harboring resentment? Are you abusive in word or deed to your spouse, to your children, or to anyone else? Have you been callous to those who are in genuine need?

I tell you today that your Savior has taken your sins against His Law upon Himself. The death that He died on the cross, the murder that happened to Him at the hands of men, He died for you and for your sins. His righteous life is exchanged for your unrighteous life. He kept the Ten Commandments perfectly for you. Truly, I say to you, He has paid every last penny. His is a righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees. By His righteousness, you will enter the kingdom of heaven. "We know that our old self was crucified with Him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been made righteous from sin."

He is the Lord our God and so His Ten Commandments are very beneficial for us to hear. Because our Lord Himself spoke the words of the Holy Ten Commandments in the Old Testament, because He Himself explained and summarized them in the New Testament, they apply to us. No Christian should neglect knowing them. No Christian should neglect reciting them in their home. They show us what a godly and Christian life consists of. Furthermore, the same Person who spoke the Ten Commandments also fulfilled them in our stead and paid for our breaking of them. Who else could do it? Knowing that Christ fulfilled the Law for us and suffered the entire penalty of our law-breaking, what greater comfort can we have at Judgment Day? We will partake of Christ's full atonement!

The doctor who best understands the disease finds the best medicine. Christ knows our disease, as He's proven in the Ten Commandments, so He gives us the medicine of His forgiveness by which we are cured. All hail the Great Physician who has obliterated death that we now have eternal life. Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠