

Sermon for Trinity 6 – Matthew 5:20-26

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

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgement.’ While it was said to those of old, these hallowed words should still be said to us today and taken to heart. Turn in your hymnal to pg. 321 and find the 5th Commandment and how Martin Luther explained it. Pg. 321 we read together...

God’s Fifth Commandment guards human life. This commandment is a fence protecting this valuable gift. Human life is valuable because God Himself places value on it. It’s not valuable because human beings place value on it. If my neighbor does not value my life, my life is no less valuable. Some think that people of a different skin color, social standing, language, or culture are not as valuable as they are. But the God who created us is the one who decides our value. With all the talk these days about “values” the first question we should ask when we hear that familiar word is “whose values?” God’s values? Or the values of a godless culture?

There was a time in our country when the civil law reflected God’s value of human life. And the law is a teacher. Even when the law cannot be enforced, it stands as a teacher of what’s right and wrong, as long as the law is in agreement with what is right and wrong. The damage done by abortion-on-demand laws in America cuts even deeper than the slaughter of millions of unborn children. The killing of those babies has the full sanction of the law in our country. The Supreme Court still forbids any state from passing laws to protect the unborn. Legal abortion has killed more than babies. It has killed America’s soul. We are a nation who will not protect her weakest citizens, and we’ve only begun to reap the detriments of this choice.

“You shall not murder.” You shall not murder because God made us in His image, and to murder a human being is therefore a direct attack on our Creator. No woman has the right to kill the fruit of her womb. The only rights we have are those given to us by God, and God never gave a woman the right to kill her baby. God says in Deuteronomy 32:39, “See now that I, even I, am He, and there is no god beside Me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of My hand.”

But it’s easy to love the unborn baby of someone we’ve never met. It’s easy to care for the infant whom we will never bear any responsibility. And it’s easy to sit in judgment against the sins that we don’t commit. If only the law always pointed its finger at the other guy! “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.” In this way, the law against murder accuses, indicts, tries, and condemns us all. Not just forbidding evil thoughts and words,

but it requires us to love our enemies. It requires that we earnestly seek out what is good for others, even for the one who wants to hurt us. The Fifth Commandment doesn't just apply to those whose violence is so out of control that they have to be incarcerated or worse. It applies to us who keep our hatred well hidden from view. It applies to us who harbor evil within our hearts against another person. It applies to us who don't really care what happens to our neighbor as long as it doesn't affect us. Yes, even our apathy is breaking the Fifth Commandment.

Slapping, hitting, punching, shoving, threatening, bullying, and saying words designed to evoke fear in another are also sins against the Fifth Commandment. Sometimes fathers hide behind the authority granted them in the Fourth Commandment to break the Fifth Commandment. Sometimes men think they can abuse their wives verbally, emotionally, or physically without repercussion. Sometimes drug or alcohol abuse leads to violent behavior. Cursing, yelling, screaming, and destroying property in an angry rage will often lead to physical violence. All of this is forbidden by the Fifth Commandment.

The Fifth Commandment forbids private revenge. Listen to the words of St. Paul: "Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.' To the contrary, 'if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." God forbids private revenge. He has given the government the authority to punish those who do wrong as St. Paul clearly says in Romans 13, "For [the governing authority] is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer." The government carries the sword as God's servant to punish those who commit crimes. So we entrust justice to the governing authorities because God forbids private revenge.

Part of the government's "bearing the sword" is the right to execute capital punishment. When applied rightly by the government to those who are guilty of murder, the death penalty is based on respect for the value of human life. Since we are made in God's image, our lives cannot be taken away from us. Those who kill another person must pay for the crime with their own lives.

The Word of God was written primarily that we might come to know and trust the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ and in Him receive life. Even this word of God in the Fifth Commandment: "You shall not murder," works in this way. Jesus faced death. He faced the death penalty under the government. He faced it though He was innocent. But He faced it because He chose to. He chose to face it for two reasons. First, because He loved

His Father who willed Him to die. Second, because He loved us who deserved to die. Without this murder, we wouldn't have life!

The Father willed the Son to die because in this way He would remove our death from us. The soul that sins shall die. We sinned. We face death. There is no way around it. We deserve to die. The Law was spoken. By us it is broken. The Law is divine. It cannot be set aside. So the Father willed His dearly beloved Son to die in our place as our substitute. But He didn't force Him to do so against His will. He didn't demand anything from His Son that His Son was not willing to give. Rather, in a mysterious and wonderful way, the Father's love and the Son's love, the Father's purpose and the Son's purpose, the Father's will and the Son's will, blended perfectly together from all eternity into the choice, God's choice, for us to live forever by Christ's death.

What a wonder! The world cannot understand it! The self-righteous heart is scandalized by it and despises this grace! But the soul that is burdened by sins and guilt adores it, kneels before it, and receives it fully. In the murderous crucifixion of Christ, man killed Him and God killed Him. But while mankind killed Him in hatred, God killed Him out of love so deep that it plunged right into the very depths of our sin to destroy our sin at its root. God was killed. The God who cannot die died. The God who cannot suffer suffered. The God who cannot sin bore all sin as an offering for our sin.

The truth is that there can be only one solution for our sin and that is the murder of the Son of God. It is *the* solution. His death destroyed our death. For I tell you, in this you have a righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees; you will surely enter the kingdom of heaven.

So we bow our heads before the Christ. We kneel at His altar, confessing that we have not loved our neighbor, confessing that our hearts are stained with the same sin as has soiled and calloused the conscience of our nation. But we come in humble faith that God will not let our sins destroy our souls. He gives us to eat and drink the Body and Blood of the crucified and risen Lord Jesus that has secured for us life in the face of death and forgiveness for all our sins. We come to receive life. And God gives us life, and that to eternity. Amen.

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

This sermon (with some modifications) was preached by the Rev. R. D. Preus and can be found in his book Christ For Us, Sussex, WI: Concordia Catechetical Academy, 2017.