



ST. ANDREW'S IN THE PINES EPISCOPAL CHURCH

SERMON
2-12-17

Listen carefully for you will hear the Good News.

This section of readings in Matthew are part of the teachings from Jesus commonly called the Sermon on the Mount. We began a few weeks ago listening to the beatitudes..blessed are those who mourn for they shall..... Last week ended with Jesus stating that he had not come to change the law, but to fulfill the law. Now today he addresses some parts of this Mosaic Law.

Many times this section is headed or called “the difficult teachings” and they do address murder, adultery, divorce and oaths – tough subjects. But before you dismiss what you have heard told to you – pause – consider- the words and teaching of Jesus our Christ are the Good News – they are the good news. Let’s examine a bit to find that good news.

First – Jesus is talking about the Mosaic laws – those laws found in the Torah, those laws that remind us of the Ten Commandments, those laws that have guided the people of Israel for hundreds of years. Jesus tells us he doesn’t come to have us break those laws but understand them in ways that give us life – that bring us good news. Sometimes the expression used to talk about this teaching by Jesus is that there is the letter of the law – You must not. And there is the Spirit of the law – but I tell you. Jesus says – you have heard -but I say to you.....this is how to live with this law. When Jesus tells us to consider the Spirit of the law he is pushing us for discernment - for deeper understanding – the roots, the why of these laws, the actions we take that lead to consequences.

Jesus is saying – if you do this – then this develops- you will behave this way or this action will happen. True obedience means paying attention to the steps you take before you violate the actual defined law. So for example: Murder

Jesus speaks about our spiritual attitudes first. If you are angry, if you are insulting, if you treat others with derision – you are already liable to judgment, you are already on the path to murdering someone – you are demeaning them, you are dismissing them, you are treating them as less valuable than you – you are already taking life from them. Do you understand how important this is???? Seek reconciliation RIGHT AWAY – immediately, be aggressive in the steps you take. Don’t even worship at the church until you act on your harsh and judgmental behavior. Seek mediation, seek renewal of relationship. All of these actions are in your best self-interest. Can you see what sense that makes? Holding hateful thoughts, living with anger or derision erodes Your worthiness as a person. So take the actions now to let yourself live.

In the same way look at adultery – watch for – examine yourself for early warning signs. Do your internal work- how are you viewing other people? Are other persons becoming an object for your desires? Do you desire sex or other gratification for yourself without considering the humanity of that person? Take extreme actions – don't go there. Jesus describes huge consequences – consequences that take on an eschatological or end times significant. Your life won't be worth much if you don't honor your body and the body of others. So if your eye is wandering and you look on people as objects – cut that eye out. If your hand is used to touch others inappropriately – cut it off. Don't go there – ever! Do your own internal work – examine your spirit within you.

One of the lessons we talk about in pre-marital counseling is that the act of adultery is much more than a sexual act. Adultery has so many steps. If you withhold information from your partner because it is for your gratification or secret – you have already strayed – you have already broken the spirit of the law. Do prevention by noticing early warning signs.

Which carries over to divorce. Asking men to provide a certificate of divorce was asking them to examine and state for all to see – why they wished to divorce. To share this certificate was to say – you have taken steps and made decisions that have led you down this pathway. Pay attention to yourself and your choices.

After those topics the subject of oaths might not seem that important but obviously it was a problem. I can see the same sort of problem today in our society. Jesus is admonishing against false bravado – of making the big statements and then not being able to carry them out – for overstatement – for being dramatic when the drama doesn't help in anyway. Rather – making the big statements can lead to hypocrisy and lead you down unhealthy paths. Just say yes or no – and keep your word.

So in all of the laws – before you officially break a law – look for the source of your transgressions – why do you feel the need to deride your neighbor, or see another person as an object for lust, or a spouse as someone to be dismissed or the need for drama when you speak. Pay attention to yourself – do your interior work – reflect why? Search yourself, own it, correct it, on your own.

For years I studied and faithfully followed the 12 step program. I often tell people that it saved my life. Following those steps asked me to take time each evening to examine what or who had made me angry that day. Then to examine my part in those feelings, and decide how to seek mediation or reconciliation. Doing that interior work each evening not only kept me humble – it filled me with hope and peace.

That's what Jesus is offering to us. Don't act self-righteous because we haven't technically broken any laws. Rather use spiritual discernment to notice where we are straying, what steps or thoughts are leading us toward harming our self or another? Then have the courage to take corrective action showing that we have HEARD the good news and taken it into our lives.

Thanks be to God.