

The Sixth Sunday after Trinity Sunday
St. Matthew 5:20-26
July 24th, 2022
St. Bartholomew Evangelical Lutheran Mission, UAC
Fort Myers, FL
Pastor Jerald Dulas

Agree with Your Adversary Quickly

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 God, enter not into judgment with us, who have not from the heart kept Thy commandments, but regard the precious merit of Thy dear Son, and let us ever be partakers of His righteousness. Enable us also by Thy Holy Spirit to walk in Thy fear, true faith, and holiness of living and to beware of pride and security, that we may not be cast into everlasting prison, but enter into Thy eternal Kingdom; through Thy dear Son Jesus Christ, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

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

When some people hear “unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the Kingdom of Heaven” they believe they immediately need to work on being more righteous than the scribes and Pharisees. But that is not what our Lord + Jesus is saying here. Make note that our Lord states that the requirement to enter the Kingdom of Heaven is to be *more* righteous than the scribes and Pharisees. Even their righteousness does not cut it. Even the scribes and Pharisees, who were the very model of clean, holy, living, are not worthy of the Kingdom of Heaven according to their righteousness. Their works do not merit them Heaven, any more than anyone else. Our Lord + Jesus is using the Law to point out how silly it is to try to merit eternal life based upon one’s works. He does this by using the Fifth Commandment. He shows us our lack of keeping the Law by teaching us about murder.

Murder is not just taking the life of another person. That is certainly the grossest form of murder, but as our Lord teaches, murder involves any harm to our neighbor, even verbal harm. Murder does not just have to be done physically in order for it to be murder. We can murder our fellow man with our words. Indeed, we can even murder our neighbor with our very own thoughts, when we think evil about our neighbor, even though we have never said it out loud, or acted upon it with our own hands. What our Lord does here is show us how perfectly the Law must be kept in order for a person to obtain the Kingdom of Heaven through their own righteousness. In short, it cannot be done.

Our Lord supplies some examples. If we are angry with our brother, and our Lord means here those who are especially closest to us, but this commandment applies to all men, we are in danger of the judgment. Notice the proviso that our Lord makes that this applies to being angry at our brother “without a cause.” There are some who would latch onto to that phrase and claim justification for their anger, because “I am in the right.” People are usually convinced of their own innocence in any given situation. We have a tendency as human beings to paint ourselves in the most beneficial light. We do not like to admit that we are wrong. How can we be wrong, we are the ones who are full of great virtue? Therefore, we are prone to justifying our anger. We have a just cause for our anger, so we are justified in being angry at our brother.

But the anger that our Lord + Jesus refers to here is the righteous anger against sinfulness and evil. Sin and sinful behavior merit our anger. They are opposed to our righteousness, our holiness that has been given to us by the work of the Holy Ghost. Sin is opposed to the indwelling of the Holy Ghost. That which is holy cannot exist where that which is unholy—sin—desires to dwell. Blatant, willful sin drives away the Holy Ghost. He cannot dwell where is not wanted. Therefore, unbelievers who through their obstinacy drive away the Holy Ghost cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. They cannot be a part of something of which they refuse to join through their unbelief.

But our Lord + Jesus makes it even clearer that even our anger, the anger of believers, drives us away from the Kingdom of Heaven. This is especially true when we remain obstinate and cling onto our anger against our fellow man. Notice, too, that the anger does not have to involve our words or our actions. We are guilty just by our angry thoughts.

The same is true of our words. We are guilty of breaking the Fifth Commandment when we say to our brother, “Raca!” “Raca!” means “empty-headed fool.” Synonyms would be “blockhead”, “numbskull,” or “dunderhead.” If this is true, that we break the Fifth Commandment by calling other people “idiot,” then some of us break this commandment almost every time we get behind the wheel of a car. For some of us, it may even be whenever we are surrounded by other people.

Our Lord also uses the example of calling people “fool.” The Greek word is “moron.” It means “fool,” “stupid,” “useless.” It is the opposite of wise. A moron is someone who is the opposite of wise. A fool is the opposite of wise. It is hard not to commit this sin, especially since we are living in the dumbest time in the history of mankind...so far. Unwise people are in much abundance.

None of this helps us, though, if to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven our righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. We are prone to anger. We are prone to calling people numbskull and moron. Some of us may even be prone to physical violence. What our Lord shows us here is that we are all prone to breaking the Fifth Commandment in thought, word, and deed. We cannot be saved by our keeping of the Fifth Commandment. If that is the case, we fail nearly every time we have the opportunity to keep it.

Our Adversary, the devil, is also readily there to make this known to us. The Adversary wants to lead us into great despair over our sins. He can also certainly lead people into pride over their righteousness; lead them to think that they are doing a good job of being more righteous than the scribes and Pharisees. We are led like blind beggars into one of those two ditches. We are led into the ditch of pride, or we are led into the ditch of despair. Neither ditch leads us into the Kingdom of Heaven. When we are filled with pride we cannot see our sins, and therefore cannot and will not repent of them. We cannot confess sins we refuse to acknowledge. When we are filled with despair, all we see is our sin and misery. We see no hope of rescue when we are consumed by the sin before our eyes.

This is why our Lord + Jesus, the Christ, gives us relief and a way out of the ditches of pride and despair. He tells us to agree with our Adversary quickly. The Adversary is the one who stands and accuses us of our sins. He is the one who confirms us in our pride and righteousness. Our Adversary is quite simply our greatest enemy. He desires our eternal destruction, and he will use any means in order to secure us in that eternal torment and Hell.

There is hope and help, however, for those of us who agree with our Adversary that we are poor, miserable sinners. There is hope for us who disagree with our Adversary that our righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees. In either case, when we forsake our self-professed righteousness, and confess our sinfulness, we are turning outside of ourselves. We are no longer looking at ourselves at the means of our salvation or destruction. This is why we have salvation through faith in the Lord + Jesus. Faith clings to the Christ. It clings to His works and merits. It clings to His

perfect righteousness. He has perfectly fulfilled the Law. He has perfectly kept the Fifth Commandment. He as obeyed and fulfilled the Law which we were and are unable to keep. And for all those times which we have been angry; all those times we have though words of hate and anger toward our brother, or called him moron and dunderhead, and even for all those times where we have physically acted in violence, He has borne those sins in His flesh on the tree of the holy cross. He atoned for those sins by His innocent suffering and death on the tree of the holy cross.

Therefore, my dear friends, agree with your Adversary quickly, and confess your sins, forget your own righteousness, and cling in faith to the perfect works and merits of the Christ, Who fulfilled the whole Law for you, and suffered and died on the cross to atone for your sins. He gives to us that forgiveness through His precious means of grace. We have heard the Absolution from the Pastor earlier in the Service. We remembered our Holy Baptisms, which St. Paul reminds us about in the Epistle reading, when the Pastor blessed us with the sign of the holy cross. We make that sign of the cross often, morning and evening, and at all times, to remind ourselves that we have been washed clean and free from our sins, and they have been paid for by the death of our Lord on the cross.

My dear friends, we will also be given the gift of forgiveness here before this altar when we receive the Body and Blood of our Lord + Jesus which was offered for us on the tree of the holy cross. Wherever forgiveness of sins is found, there can be found also salvation and eternal life. Where there is forgiveness of sins found through faith in the works and merits of the Lord + Jesus Christ, there is opened to us the gates of the Kingdom of Heaven. My dear friends, let us enter into those gates with thanksgiving, for our Lord has forgiven us of all our anger and hatred, for which we have been sorry, and confessed, and looked to be free from such bonds and burdens. Thanks be to the Lord God for forgiving us of our sins. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Almighty God, be pleased to accompany Thy Word with Thy Holy Spirit and grant that Thy Word would increase faith in us; bring into the Way of Truth all such as have erred; turn the hearts of the unrepentant; and for sake of Thy Name grant succor to all heavy hearts and those who are heavy-laden, that they may through the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ be relieved and preserved so that they succumb not to the temptation of despair but rather that they gain the victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with the Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

The Votum:

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

Soli Deo Gloria!