

Sermon for The 6th Sunday after Epiphany

Date: February 16, 2020

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

Old Testament: Deuteronomy 30:15-20

Epistle Reading: 1 Corinthians 3:1-9

Gospel Reading: Matthew 5:21-37

Sermon Text: Matthew 5:21-37

Sermon Title: Did He Really Mean It?



Introit: Psalm 98:7-9; Antiphon: Psalm 98:2

Hymns:

LSB 610 – Lord Jesus Think On Me

LSB 456 – Where You There

W&P #122 – Seek Ye First

LSB 611 – Chief of Sinner Though I Be

Distribution:

W&P #23 – Broken for Me

LSB 779 – Come, My Soul, with Every Care

Liturgy:

Divine Service IV, p. 203



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Text: Matthew 5:21-37

You have heard that it was said to your ancestors, “Never murder. Whoever murders will answer for it in court.” I can guarantee that whoever is angry with another believer will answer for it in court. Whoever calls another believer an insulting name will answer for it in the highest court. Whoever calls another believer a fool will answer for it in hellfire.

So if you are offering your gift at the altar and remember there that another believer has something against you, leave your gift at the altar. First go away and make peace with that person. Then come back and offer your gift.

Make peace quickly with your opponent while you are on the way to court with him. Otherwise, he will hand you over to the judge. Then the judge will hand you over to an officer who will throw you into prison. I can guarantee this truth: You will never get out until you pay every penny of your fine.

You have heard that it was said, “Never commit adultery.” I can guarantee that whoever looks with lust at a woman has already committed adultery in his heart. So if your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose a part of your body than to have all of it thrown into hell. If your right hand leads you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose a part of your body than to have all of it go into hell.

It has also been said, “Whoever divorces his wife must give her a written notice.” I can guarantee that any man who divorces his wife for any reason other than unfaithfulness makes her look as though she has committed adultery. Whoever marries a woman divorced in this way makes himself look as though he has committed adultery.

You have heard that it was said to your ancestors, “Never break your oath, but give to the Lord what you swore in an oath to give him.” I tell you do not swear an oath at all. Do not swear an oath by heaven, which is God’s throne, or by the earth which is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, which is the city of the great King. Do not swear an oath by your head. After all, you cannot make one hair black or white. Simply say yes or no. Anything more than that comes from the evil one.

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Grace, to you and peace, in the name of our risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our Gospel lesson for today didn't really have a lot of Gospel in it. Gospel is a Greek word. It means good news. When we read the Gospel lesson we read from one of the four Good News letters, this one by Matthew. The overall message of the four Gospels, or Good News letters, is that the Messiah has come and His name is Jesus. He has redeemed you, saved you, and made you perfect in the eyes of your Heavenly Father. That is the Good News.

However, at times the short readings we take for our Sunday services do not always have a lot of good news in them. For example in today's reading we heard things like, "Do not murder." Then Jesus defined murder as being angry with another believer. We heard, "Do not commit adultery." Then Jesus defined adultery as simply looking too long. In fact the entire reading for today makes it clear that no one could ever be good in the eyes of our heavenly Father's without Jesus' salvation.

Then Jesus goes so far as to say, throw your hand away, throw your eye away, get rid of anything and everything that causes you to lose sight of God and His will and His Word. Who here would truly be willing to have your eyes removed? It is a daunting proposition.

What if that was the only way? What if the only way you could escape the torment of eternal Hell was to cut off your hands, remove your eyes, and live that way for the remainder of your days. Would you be willing to go that far? How full would our churches be if that was the requirement that earned you a mansion in Heaven?



So the question is, did Jesus really mean it? The answer is most probably 'yes.' However, He also knows that is more than we are able to do, and that is why our salvation is not in our hands, it is in His. Where we can do nothing to get ourselves into Heaven He could, and did, do everything to get you into Heaven. Jesus didn't just give up a hand or an eye, He endured hours of beatings, betrayal, and berating by people against whom He had done nothing unkind. In fact He prayed for them, He reached out to them, He tried to be their Friend. He had come to give them eternal life. For that He was nailed to

posts and lifted up to hang there in the sun. He died a horrible, painful, torturous death of suffocation.

You would think that would be enough. Surely that would have earned our way into Heaven, but that was not enough. There was more, much, much, more. Jesus also had to not only carry our sins, but He had to become sin.¹ He then had to endure to full unfettered fury of Almighty God. All of the Father's rage, hate, venom, and contempt was unleashed on Him. He was wholly and completely abandoned by God. He was, hanging on that cross, in Hell while He yet breathed.



If you ever wonder what Hell is like look to Jesus when He screams, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?!”² There, right there, for all to see was a person enduring the vile, unendurable, unimaginable, torment of being completely cut off and separated from our heavenly Father.

Why? Why did all that happen? Why did Jesus say, cut off your hands, remove your eyes, do everything, do anything, to keep you out of Hell and bound down that narrow road³ that leads to Heaven?

To answer that question we need to ask another question. Why did Jesus go through all that horrible torture and pain? Why did He bother? What did you do for Him that He would think to do that for you? Besides that was 2,000 years ago. You weren't born yet. You hadn't done anything wrong, or right, yet. Why would He do that for you?

The answer is love. God is love.⁴ That is the nature of His very existence. Why does God not attack and exact His revenge on all the unfaithful people in the world? There have been billions of people since creation who have ignored Him, lied about Him, hated Him, even tried to attack Him and destroy Him. Why did God not punish all of them? ... all of us? Why did He take it out on His Son?

We all remember those accounts like the Flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, and the plagues of Egypt. These were those rare moments when God did punish, but the truth is those were actually uncommon and many many years apart. God rarely acts

1 1 Corinthians 5:21

2 Mark 15:34 (Jesus here was quoting Psalm 22, a powerful song of lament and pain, that ends with a promise to all, even those yet unborn, that salvation will come.)

3 Matthew 7:14

4 1 john 4:8

that way. It is only in a final act of desperation to ensure some remnant of the faithful could remain. So what is He so desperate about?

Why did God hold back His wrath and anger all those thousands of years until His Son was born? Why did He wait 30 more years until His Son, Jesus, was betrayed and framed by friends. The Father waited until His Son was nearly dead, physically and mentally exhausted, and then the floodgates of all, not some, not a portion, but all, of God's holy, unrestrained, unfettered, unshackled rage was unleashed, but not the on the traitors, saboteurs, and liars; not on the false teaches and heretics; not even you, but on His own Son.

Could you have done that? Of course you couldn't. You love your children even when they misbehave, even when they are defiant, even when they say they hate you. Still you love them. Imagine now the Father who loves perfectly.⁵ How could He who loves perfectly do that to His own Son? Parents can look into your heart and see clearly just how bitter and difficult that job must have been.

So, why? Why did They do that. Why did the Father take out His anger on His Son Jesus instead of us? Why did Jesus voluntarily go to the cross to take it?⁶ The answer is you. You are the reason why. God created us to be exactly what He wanted us to be. He created us to be the kind eternal beings that He wanted to live with Him forever. He wanted to show us how much He loved us, to show us how deeply He cared for and about us, to show us how deep and high, far and wide⁷ His love is for us, and how serious He is when He says nothing can separate us from Him.⁸ He did all of that, endured all of that, for you. So that you would not have to cut off your hand, so that you would not have to remove your eyes, so that you would not have to do anything. He did it all for you.

At the beginning this sermon you probably thought hands and eyes were a lot to ask. Now that you see the real price, the price Jesus paid, maybe hands and eyes don't seem like all that much. The truth is hands and eyes aren't enough. Jesus' point was: don't take this for granted. Don't take your salvation as something insignificant or incidental. It was earned for you at a great price. It required a parent to kill His Son, a Father to torture His own Son to death. It was a price you cannot begin to imagine.

Why? Why did He do that? To give you a life you cannot begin to imagine. To give you a life, an eternal life, where all of the mess of this world will be just a



5 Luke 11:11-13

6 John 10:18

7 Ephesians 3:14-19

8 John 10:28

distant memory. A fond memory of God displaying the vast unmeasurable love for you.

In our Gospel reading today there was not a lot of Good News. Jesus was really laying down the Law. He did that not to make you sweat your salvation. He did that to help you see how much it cost. He did not do that to make you feel guilty or to feel like you owed Him something. He did that to express His indescribable love, care and concern for you.

Jesus, while He walked this Earth, often wept for people.⁹ He wept for them because He cared about them. Even those who hated Him without reason. He, of course, knows life here is tough, He knows the road to Heaven is rocky and rough. He only asks you to trust Him. He has shown you that you can. He has walked the road ahead of you. He has shown you the way. Follow Him. Trust Him. Rely on Him. He is your salvation. He is the way, the truth, and the life, and the only way to Heaven.¹⁰ He has come to show you the Father's love. He has come to get you home.

Amen.

9 Matthew 23:37-39; John 11:35

10 John 14:6