

Trinity VI, 2006  
Text: Matthew 5:20-26  
Trinity Lutheran, Worden, IL & Zion Lutheran, Carpenter, IL  
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✠Grace, Mercy, and Peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ ✠

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

So much for Jesus meek and mild – Jesus the nice guy, the fellow who pats you on your head and says, “Aw shucks, I guess you did try your best. Never mind if you didn't quite live a holy life – that's no big deal. God grades on a curve and you're better than most.” Such a wishy-washy Jesus doesn't exist – though that is what the world would like him to be. Everybody's favorite Jesus-quote is “Judge not, lest ye be judged.” They assume that because Jesus tells us that we can't sit in the seat of ultimate Judgment, that he won't either. Nothing could be farther from the Truth. As is evidenced by what Jesus says today in our Gospel lesson.

The Commandment says “Don't murder” - and Jesus tells the full story of what that means. Not only shall you not kill your neighbor – but if you by your thoughts and actions show that you wish harm or death would come to him you have broken this commandment. Indeed, gentle Jesus meek and mild says this, “He who says 'You fool!' to his neighbor is liable to the hell of fire.” How many times have you shouted this or similar curses? How many times have you enjoyed thinking about how stupid your boss is, calling him names behind his back with your fellow workers? How many times have you had a scornful chuckle with your girlfriends about your idiot husband? Your righteousness does not surpass that of the Pharisees and the scribes – they have you beat by miles. And the verdict of Jesus is sure: You are liable to the hell of fire.

So repent. That is what Jesus is driving at. He wants you to realize that you have not kept this commandment – that you have completely failed to keep God's Law. That on your own you will always and only earn a trip to the hell of fire. So you had better turn away from yourself – you had better not try to make excuses. Jesus does not want to hear them. You have sinned because you are a sinner and if you are supposed to find a righteousness in yourself that surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you might as well start packing for a warm and permanent vacation in hell's fire.

But do not despair – Jesus does not want that. Well, I suppose he does want

you to despair of yourself, but he does not want you to despair of him. For you see, there is a righteousness that surpasses that of the Scribes and the Pharisees. St. Paul speaks of it in Philippians chapter 3: **Philippians 3:4-11** “If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: <sup>5</sup> circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup> as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness, under the law blameless. <sup>7</sup> But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup> Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup> and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.”

Yes, St. Paul has got it right. He was a Pharisee's Pharisee – more concerned with keeping God's law in his sleep than you are in waking – and still he considers it all a loss because he knows that he needs a righteousness greater than that. And he finds it not in himself, but in Christ. For The LORD is our Righteousness as the prophet Jeremiah says. All the righteousness of Jesus is given to you in your baptism. That is what St. Paul says in our Epistle lesson for today: you are baptized into Christ – and have therefore been buried with him in his death and raised with him in his resurrection. Sin and death are dead because Jesus, the Holy One of Israel, God in the flesh, freely offered his life even though he had no sin to pay for. He fulfilled the Law we could never keep. And now he gives us a righteousness we could never earn.

So be at peace. You are forgiven and free from the Law's condemnation. You are not free from the Law in the sense St. Paul warns us about in our Epistle. You are not free to live an evil and wicked life by saying, “Aw shucks, gentle Jesus, meek and mild will just forgive me – I'll sin that his grace may abound.” How could you live this way? For you are in Christ and Christ is dead to sin and alive to God. Now you are empowered to live a Christian life. A life of continual repentance and faith. This life is hard – harder than anything else you will ever do. For though you are forgiven and free in Christ, you are also still stuck in this fallen world. Your enemy the devil still prowls around like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour.

So be vigilant. Do not lean on your own understanding. Do not rely on your own strength to ward off temptations to sin and fall away from the faith. For truly, God cannot be mocked: you cannot live in open, willful, rebellious sin and say you have faith in Christ. You cannot sin in that way which looks God in the eye and says “I know what you want, God, but I don't care: I'm going to do it my way.”

That kind of high-handed sin will drive faith and the Holy Spirit away – because that kind of sin is the opposite of faith, which is trusting your Lord Jesus.

So the Christian life is not one of open, rebellious sin. Instead, the Christian life is one of constant repentance – for since we are stuck in this fallen world, we will suffer from constant falls into unwillful sin. St. Paul, again, speaks of his experience in this regard in Romans 7: **Romans 7:14-25** “<sup>18</sup> For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. <sup>19</sup> For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. <sup>20</sup> Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. <sup>21</sup> So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. <sup>22</sup> For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, <sup>23</sup> but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. <sup>24</sup> Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? <sup>25</sup> Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

Can you hear the struggle in Paul's words? Have you not felt what he feels? Why did I do that again? Why can't I overcome this sin? O Lord, save me! That is repentance and faith. That is your life as a Christian. And that life must be lived in the Life of Christ which you receive at this Altar. If you are going to persevere in the faith - you must lean on Christ and his life, you must be filled up with the Righteousness that goes beyond that of the scribes and the Pharisees. You need the forgiveness of your sins, life, and salvation. It is here for you in your Lord's body and blood. Therefore, let us hasten to receive him.

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

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Now the peace of God which passes all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

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