

Trinity XVIII, 2006
Text: St. Matthew 22:34-46
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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.

Jesus sums up the Law of God for us today. All the commands, all the “thou shalt” and the “thou shalt not” he says can be summed up like this: Love God above everything with your whole being and love your neighbor as you love yourself. There it is. Simple as can be: Love. Do this and you shall live; for up on Love hang all the Law and Prophets.

But who among us shall claim that he has loved without fail? Who among us shall claim that she has done this and so deserves accolades from God? Who among you has no harsh words of hatred that you regret? Who among you has never stewed inside for weeks or months or years on a grudge against someone? Who among you has always placed God above all things? Above money – above sleep – above leisure: and those are just the top three among the competitor gods vying for attention on Sunday morning. If this kind of all-giving, self-denying love is what sums up the Law then no human being has kept it wholly. No one is righteous, no not one, as St. Paul says.

So repent. Your hope cannot be found in the Law, in your failed attempts to love as you ought to love. You have failed. That is what Jesus is trying to drive home to this Pharisee who asks him the question about the Law; and it's what Jesus is saying to you as well. The Law demands perfect love – all the Law hangs on it – and since you don't have such love, you're the one who will hang if you are judged by it.

But Jesus, of course, came not to condemn, but to save. So he presses the Pharisee with a new question – a question not of the Law which shows us our sins, but a question of the Gospel which is to show us our Savior. He asks, “Whose Son is the Christ?” David's, they answer, and they are right. Jesus is descended from David, a son of the true King. He is a man, born of his Blessed Virgin Mother in

David's town. That's part of the good news, part of the Gospel – but not all of it. If Jesus were just a Son of David, he would be of no more help to us than any other man.

So Jesus presses on – he wants this Pharisee, and you, to know the Good News. If he is David's Son, why does David call him Lord? No father calls his son Lord – so how can David call the Christ, David's Son, Lord? This shuts the mouths of the Pharisees. They do not want to admit what Jesus lays before them: David's Son is David's Lord for this Son of David is not a mere man, but God in human flesh - the God who steps into our misery and sin, our world so mired with hate in the place of love. And this is another piece to the Good News. Jesus is God and man in one person so that he might fulfill the Law for us and save us from our sins.

Where your love has faltered, Jesus' love always succeeds. He kept the whole Law in your place. He was always kind and good, never bitter, never revenging, always turning the other cheek. He loved with a perfect love. And so Jesus kept the Law.

But Jesus keeps the Law in another way. As the Law hangs on Love, so all who do not Love God perfectly and constantly must be hung on the Law's punishments. Do this and you shall live, says the Law; but fail to do it and you shall die. And that's just what Jesus did. He fulfilled the Law for you by being hung on the cross. That is what the Law demanded – that is the price sin calls for: the death of the sinner. And on that cross God made Jesus who knew no sin to become sin for you. All the sins of the world, and your sins too, were hung up in Jesus' body on the cross. He bore the weight of your iniquity – by his stripes you are healed.

And that is what it means for the Son of David to rule and reign and have his enemies be put under his feet. As Christ is lifted up from the ground on the cross, we enemies of God find ourselves standing under his feet so that we might be washed in the water and blood flowing from his side. That is how we are transformed from the enemies of God into his beloved sons and daughters. Washed clean in holy baptism we are renewed in this self-giving love of Christ. Nourished with the very Blood of Christ in the Supper here at the altar we are put under the feet of the Son of David so that we can be forgiven and live forever.

This is our Christian hope. It is the reason we can look death in the face and not lose hope. Christ and his death in our place and his resurrection for our salvation – because of these we are bold to say, “O death where is thy victory? O

grave, where is thy sting.” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the Law – but Christ has fulfilled the Law in every way and gives us the victory. It no longer has power over those who have been brought into the kingdom of the Son of David by rebirth in the waters of Holy Baptism. So Christians do not mourn as those who have no hope. We have a firm hope. Our hope for loved one's who have died in the Lord is not their love, or their goodness, or their bravery – for we know that they, like us, have not fulfilled the perfect Law of love. No, our hope for those who die in the Faith is much stronger than that: for our hope is Christ himself, God himself in the flesh, Love incarnate – who poured out his life for them and for us.

So Christians, rejoice. You are forgiven and and you are free. In the midst of your mourning and remembrance this day, rejoice that those who die in Christ rest with Christ and we await a reunion with them in a new and heavenly kingdom – a kingdom that comes on earth even as it comes in heaven as we join with angels and archangels and all the faithful departed, with all the company of heaven to praise and adore Him who comes to us in his Body and Blood – the sure proof that the Lord has sacrificed himself for us and gives us the remission of our sins.

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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