

The Sixth Sunday after Trinity – Pr. Faugstad sermon  
St. Matthew 5:20-26: “What to Do with What You Have Received”  
July 15/16, 2023 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

**In Nomine Iesu**

+ + +

Lord God, heavenly Father, we confess that we are poor, wretched sinners, and that there is no good in us; our hearts, flesh and blood being so corrupted by sin that we are never in this life without sinful lusts and desires. Therefore we beseech You, dear Father, forgive us these sins, and let Your Holy Spirit so cleanse our hearts that we may desire and love Your Word, abide by it, and thus by Your grace be forever saved; through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever. Amen. (*Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*, p. 159)

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)*

---

*The sermon text for today is taken from the fifth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:*

[Jesus said:] “For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. / “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire. / “So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.” (ESV)

---

*These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Joh. 17:17)*

---

In Christ Jesus, who came not to abolish the Law of God but to fulfill it for our righteousness, dear fellow redeemed:

The words of Jesus for today come from the early part of His “Sermon on the Mount.” In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus describes what a righteous life before God looks like. A righteous life is a life that matches up with what God says in His Commandments. It is to be just, right with God, blameless. Two times in His sermon, Jesus tells us to desire such a life. He says, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,” and “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness” (Mat. 5:6, 6:33).

In both of these passages, He describes a righteousness that is outside us. What we are to hunger and thirst for and seek first is God’s righteousness. That’s because our own personal righteousness is not enough. “For I tell you,” says Jesus, “unless your righteousness exceeds that of

*the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.*" The scribes and Pharisees were seen as the holiest people there were, and Jesus said their righteousness still fell short.

Then He illustrated the ways our righteousness falls short by explaining that the Commandments of God are about more than outward actions, outward conformity. You haven't kept the Fifth Commandment simply by refraining from murder. Jesus explains that this Commandment is also broken in the mind and the heart when you hold grudges, when you have anger toward another, or when you insult someone. The Fifth Commandment, along with all of the other Commandments, is fulfilled by love. If you have anger or want revenge against others, you have no love for them.

But if you think right now about the people who have been mean to you, who have been unkind to you, who have hurt you, it is easy to justify the anger or even the hatred that you feel. You gave them the benefit of the doubt, but they abused your trust. You tried to be nice, but they only got worse. So you are going to treat them how they have treated you. You are going to give them what they deserve—and it isn't love.

Imagine if Jesus took this approach. If Jesus took this approach, I would have no good word to share with you today, no comfort to impart. If Jesus treated us like we deserved, He would never have come down to make peace between us and God. He would never have suffered the wrath of man and of God and let Himself be nailed to the cross in our place. If Jesus treated us like we deserved, He would condemn us for our sins and send us to eternal suffering in hell.

But the Son of God did not become man to give us what we deserved. He came to show God's mercy and grace toward the world of sinners. Look at what love and compassion He had for the sick and hurting! So many came to Him for healing, that He often went without meals and without sleep. And He did this fully knowing where this was all going, knowing the suffering and anguish that the collective sin of humanity would cause Him.

He loved perfectly. He didn't work with an angle in mind. He didn't serve with conditions. He constantly focused on the needs of His neighbors and how He could bless them. His life is what the righteous life that God requires looks like. It is not the way our lives look. But Jesus does not look down on us or flaunt His righteousness in front of us. He lived a life of perfect righteousness *for us*.

His righteous keeping of God's Commandments counted for you. Because He is true God and true Man, whatever He did in the flesh was done on behalf of all people. This means that all who deny their own self-righteousness and trust in Him are credited with His righteousness. You will find no peace in running over and over again the wrongs done to you by others or in trying to convince yourself that you have a right to your bitterness and anger.

You will find peace in Jesus. He died for all sin—both your sin and the sin of those who have wronged you. His blood cleanses you of all of it (1Jo. 1:7). And His righteous life, His life of perfect love, covers you completely. You are a holy one by faith in Him. God is not angry with you for your many sins. He poured out His wrath against His Son, who fully atoned for all your sins. By faith in Him, your righteousness *does* exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees, because you have His righteousness. That means you *will* enter the kingdom of heaven.

Everything God required of you, He supplied you. There is nothing keeping you out of heaven. Eternal life is yours—this is most certainly true! But it is not time for heaven yet. As long as you are here, God has important work for you to do. It isn't that He needs anything from you; after all, everything on earth is His, because He made all things. But the people around you do have needs, and God has called you to love and serve them. He calls you to share with others what you have received from Him.

This is where our identity as His “righteous ones” is tested. We are glad to hear that He forgives our sins and declares us righteous, but we find it difficult to treat other people how He treats us. We can be “good with God” but not so good with others. But look at how Jesus takes the beam of love we have toward God and trains it on our neighbors. He says, *“if you are offering your gift at the altar—dedicating your prayers, thanksgivings, and offerings to God—and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”*

First things first, says Jesus. Do what you can to amend your wrong toward someone, so that you can offer your gifts to God with a cheerful heart and a clear conscience. Now there are some interpersonal issues that are difficult for us to fix. Someone might have something against us because they choose too and not because we are guilty of wronging them. These are people we show love and kindness to and pray for God to soften their hearts.

But here, Jesus is speaking about people that we have wronged by something we did to them, something we said to them, or some other way we caused offense. This applies to everyone whom we have hurt, and especially to our *brothers*—our fellow believers. It is always troubling and sad when there is a division within the family of faith, within the body of Christ.

But taking that first step toward reconciliation is a difficult one. As we said before, it is easy to justify the reasons we have treated others like we have. “They started it!” “What he did was worse than anything I ever did!” “I was only giving her what she gave to me!” Those responses are *self-righteousness*. What we are concerned about is *Jesus-righteousness*. We are willing to humble ourselves and serve and suffer just as He did for us.

Jesus is the prime example of how we are to interact with our neighbors. He never stopped loving, even when all He received was hatred. Think of His first words after being violently nailed to the cross, *“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do”* (Luk. 23:34). But Jesus is far more than our example. He is our righteousness, our forgiveness, our power source for stepping outside what we want and stepping toward a neighbor in need.

All our neighbors have to deal with our sins, so we also want to deal out Jesus' gifts to them. It is with Jesus' love and sacrifice in mind that we can have courage and strength to say those three difficult words, “I am sorry.” And it is with His love and sacrifice in mind that we can respond to those who have hurt us with those other three difficult words, “I forgive you.”

*“[B]e reconciled to your brother,”* said Jesus, *“and then come and offer your gift.”* It may even happen, by the grace of God, that when you return to offer your gift, the brother with whom you had been at odds will be kneeling right beside you, offering his gift of praise and thanksgiving to

God. This is what we are privileged to do each week as we receive Holy Communion. Husbands and wives who have hurt each other with unkind words come to receive Jesus' powerful healing through His body and blood, given and shed for the remission of their sins. The same goes for parents and children who have been fighting, or for any others in the congregation whom Satan has tried to divide.

We all come forward, not trusting in our own righteousness, but humbly trusting in Jesus' righteousness. We know how lacking our love for our neighbors has been, but we firmly believe that Jesus still forgives us and that He will strengthen us to do better. This is a beautiful pattern that repeats each week. We come weak and stained by our sin to the Divine Service, and Jesus meets us here to serve us and fill us up with His gifts.

Then He sends us back to our homes and jobs and activities with plenty of grace and forgiveness to share with others. If He never runs out of these gifts, then we won't either, and we will continuously learn what a blessing it is to love as He has loved us.

*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.*

+ + +