

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

Matthew 5:21-37

1 Corinthians 3:1-9

“We praise you with upright hearts;  
and walk in Jesus’ way.” AMEN!

“You have heard that it was said...  
but I say to you.”

Jesus said those words 3 times  
clearly in the text this morning and  
one other time it’s implied.

So, that means that 4 times  
Jesus examined pieces/commandments within  
the Torah and re-interpreted them.

When he said, “You have heard that it was said...”

Jesus addressed the way of the world.

*Human behavior* and understanding of how to live.

When Jesus said, “But I say to you...”

He addressed the way of the Spirit...  
the *God behavior* with an understanding of  
how to live.

See, that’s the most important thing  
to understand today because chances are,

since you are like me and I am like you,  
we sat back and heard this text  
from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and  
worked a scorecard in our mind, right?

I don't do that.  
Check.

Sometimes I do that.  
Little check.

Oh no, not that one... yeah, I do/did that  
and we crumple up the scorecard  
(or ask for a mulligan) and go  
about our merry way. :-)

But that's not what Jesus  
was up to in his sermon...

that's what we call dualistic thinking.

The kind of thinking that says,  
"You're either right or you're wrong/in or out.

You either do it or you don't do it.  
Jesus moves us away from  
external commandments to internal motivations,  
and when we take our time in these verses,

we just may see what Jesus was up to  
in this part of his sermon because it is  
just a snip it of it,

but the first thing he did was give an invitation  
to his listeners to engage in scripture.

Consider it, think about it,  
let the evolution of consciousness be part of it.

He did not throw out the old for something new.

Just last week he said, “Do not think I have  
come to abolish the law (Torah, the instruction),  
but to fulfill [it].”

So there’s permission from Jesus for us  
to also engage in scripture because we hear  
him doing that very thing.

We hear him giving examples through Jesus’ own  
eyes on how we can re-evaluate what God  
is up to.

As a skilled preacher, Jesus began  
with a (hopefully) simple command.

“You shall not murder.”

We can all get behind that one, right?

Then he gets a little deeper... but I say to you  
don't be angry.

Now, anger is a helpful emotion at times,  
Jesus is not condemning you or me that  
we get angry.

But cautioning that festering anger,  
unresolved conflict, when left unchecked  
or not vented in healthy ways,  
it can lead a person to murder.

So don't walk around filled with anger,  
ready to explode.

Then Jesus moved to adultery.

You have heard it said, "Do not commit adultery."

The physical act of breaking a commitment  
with your spouse is destructive to the relationship.

It hurts healthy communities,  
makes people vulnerable in ways that could  
have been avoided.

No question there, right?

But then Jesus goes a little deeper...

“but I say to you do not look upon  
another with lust.”

The text is pretty gender specific.

That a man should not look  
upon a woman with lust, but we know  
it is truthful the other way around, too.

That’s evolution of consciousness!

Again, the caution from Jesus to be mindful  
that these thoughts/desires/fixations  
(if left unchecked, left to fester) then

they may lead to the behavior that cuts  
people off from community or  
damages healthy relationships.

So be aware of these thoughts as they come  
to mind and then let them pass.

You are not your thoughts and have  
the ability and power to say, no.

Next, Jesus preached on divorce and

the making of oaths, or even clearer,  
telling the truth.

And we begin to realize, that Jesus is on  
to something much deeper than  
mere appearances.

In his invitation to engage scripture,  
he was teaching the multitudes  
(including us, if we listen) in the ways

that religion gets so often used as  
a tool to oppress people...

especially women and people  
who lack societal power.

In other words, the Torah, which at its heart  
lays a foundation for communal living and  
offers potential to humanity on what  
we can become by honoring this God

that is forming community...

the Torah (teaching) was being used  
to deeply hurt women and exclude them  
and others. (Pause)

So, hopefully that realization

makes His sermon clearer.

We have an invitation to engage in scripture, one.

And that leads us to ask ourselves,  
how is what I'm reading liberating the world?

That's always a good question to ask yourself  
when reading scripture.

How is what you're reading  
liberating the world?

Because it is not just about us...  
and we don't have to have  
the Torah figured out.

Jesus directs us to the liberating truth  
that the teaching is a pathway  
toward human flourishing.

Not a tool to improve social status;  
not a list that will bring shallow promotions;  
not a chart list to check off; and  
not something we use  
to exclude or burden.

Instead, like what Deuteronomy said,  
the Torah is a pathway and a permission

to “choose life.”

To go into deeper relationship and hear Jesus’ call  
to higher standards... internal motivations...  
showing possibilities... and moving toward  
human flourishing for all people.

And to be thoughtful, living in humility and  
never rush to judgment because we never  
know what sort of tragedy, grief,  
what sort of emergency,  
the other person is carrying.

AMEN!