**Outward Context, God’s Depth!**

**Matthew 5:17-26**

Trinity VI – 07.24.2022

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

You all know the commandments. Our Exodus text is the giving of the 10 Commandments. You know them, and their meanings as we were given them by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther.

In Exodus 20, God gives the bare essentials. Looking at them, you quickly see what I mean. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

We might say that to each of those commandments there is an outward appearing context. What I mean is, some think you take them only at face value. Some people do just that. It is murder only if you take another person’s life; it is adultery only when they actually have sexual relations with someone who is not their spouse; stealing only happens when they take the possessions of another; others believe that as long as it is true, you can say whatever you want about your neighbor; and it is amazing how many people do not understand what it means to take the name of the Lord in vain; or that keeping the Sabbath is about more than just doing no work on Sunday. (By the way, Sunday is the first day of the week, not the seventh day.)

While many may know the words of the commandments, most think in the same manner as those to whom Jesus was speaking in our Gospel lesson. They believe that as long as they have not killed someone, slept with another’s spouse, gone into someone’s house and taken their belonging, always spoken the truth about others, never used God’s name in a bad way, and lounged about on Sunday, then they have not broken the commandments. But such people do not want to get into the heart and mind of God in anything more than a superficial manner, AND they do not want to be confused by the facts.

God wants more from us than an outward appearance of obedience. We are to love God with our whole heart, mind, soul, and strength; AND we are to love our neighbors as ourselves. Scripture – in both the Old and New Testaments testify to that truth.

Our Gospel finds Jesus speaking the so-called sermon on the mount to His disciples. His words are God’s own thoughts on the Commandments – you might say that they are God’s expectations of them.

First, note that Jesus boldly state that we are not to relax any of the commandments. What exactly does that mean? Sin happens not only in the outward context, but sin also happens in the heart. In other words, we can break the commandments without ever doing something with our bodies that others may see.

Jesus declares that you do not need to take the life of your neighbor to be a murderer. You commit murder if you harbor anger against your brother, if you insult your brother, if you are unwilling to forgive your neighbor. Yes, if you take the life of another in any way, it is murder. If I pick up a gun and shoot Melvin Malcovizc in the heart – I have committed murder. But I also commit murder when I am unwilling to forgive William Rumplemintz.

Reading to the end of the seventh chapter of Matthew, Jesus clarifies a number of things about the commandments for us. He teaches that God’s depth to the commandments extends far beyond the outward context of some action with our bodies.

People take the Lord’s name in vain on a regular basis without even realizing they are doing it. The Lord’s name is taken in vain when it is said for no purpose – when it is used in some manner other than prayer, praise, thanksgiving – or talking to another about the virtues of God or in the proclamation of the Gospel. Using the Lord’s Lord in vain is blasphemy. When the people of Israel came out of Egypt, God commanded a certain punishment upon any who blaspheme?

Let me read God’s command. (Lev. 24:16) Whoever blasphemes the name of the Lord shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall stone him. The sojourner as well as the native, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death.

We are not the nation of Israel, but we see in this law the seriousness of keeping God’s name holy.

Do you know the most common phrase used by people today, for which they would have been stoned had they lived then? You know it! Yep, “oh, my God.” Nobody is not praying when they say it! Nor are they praising God by so saying! If said that with any other name than God’s it makes NO sense. It is the perfect example of using God’s name to no purpose, or, “taking Gods name in vain.”

Stealing in the heart is also a sin. That is exactly what coveting is. Stealing happens in so many ways. Texting at work when it isn’t break time is stealing from the employer. Illegal copying of videos or music is stealing. When we take advantage of another person, so that we benefit financially at their expense, is stealing.

How much adultery is committed with one person never being aware it has happened? Earlier in this chapter, Jesus proclaims that whoever lusts after another has committed adultery. Guys like to talk about looking but not touching, as if that’s OK. No, it is not OK, it is adultery! There is a thriving porn industry that takes advantage of this false notion, making billions of dollars annually off men and women who commit adultery in their hearts and minds – even if their bodies are not outwardly involved with another.

Some delude themselves thinking that as long as they are telling the truth about their neighbor, they are not “bearing false witness against their neighbor.” They key on that one word – false. If our words hurt the reputation of another so that they are less respected by someone else, we have violated the eighth commandment.

Dear friends, if you want to look at the Ten Commandments and consider how well you are keeping them, you must look beyond some the outward context and examine the depth with which God views them. Jesus did not come to abolish the Law or the prophets. They are still in effect!

Jesus did however come to fulfill the law.

Jesus never used God’s name in vain. Jesus never thought ill of His neighbor, much less spoke words which harmed their reputations. Jesus never harmed another person’s body, nor did He withhold forgiveness. He even begged His Father to forgive those who arrested Him, beat Him, whipped Him, and nailed Him to the cross. Jesus never lusted; He never stole; He never coveted. Jesus always loved His Father with all His heart, soul, mind, and strength, desiring only to do the whole will of His Father. Jesus also loved His neighbors even more than He loved His own life – He loved them to the point of laying down His life upon the cross for them.

We are to keep God’s Law, this much is true. But let us not keep it according to our standards, but according to God’s.

As we look at ourselves, and how well we keep God’s Law according to God’s standards, then we can truly appreciate what it means to be a Christian.

We MUST consider God’s Law, not just outwardly, but especially in our hearts. We must regard the depth in which it is to be part our life – in thought, word, as well as in deed. Unfortunately, we at this – miserably.

When you look past your works, examining your heart and your thoughts, and fully realize how terribly you have failed to live in God’s Law…then remember Christ’s declaration that He came to fulfill the law.

Christ came to fulfill the Law for you and for me. He came in human flesh to accomplish what we fail to accomplish.

Jesus gave this sermon on the mount to lead people to live in Torah. Not just keeping the Law, but to live in Christ. To live in a relationship with God based upon who we are as those baptized into Christ.

Jesus wants us to despair of our own works and instead look in trust to Him. Or, to say it in baptismal language, to daily drown the old Adam in contrition and repentance so that the new man can daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever – the man in Christ.

We are blessed to have two little ones begin this life in Christ. Baptized into Christ at Zion on Wednesday was Alanna Hirt – baptized into Christ today at St. John is Allison Beyer.

You and I are also baptized into Christ. All those who are, need to see their baptismal identity as dying to sin and rising to new life in Christ. That is the life of daily repentance.

Torah was given so that we would trust not in ourselves, but in Christ Jesus as Lord and Savior. His righteousness was sacrificed upon the cross to pay the price for our failures, so that we see ourselves as sinners and Jesus as our salvation.

We rejoice, for with His own right arm, He has won for us the victory over our sin and death. While Satan would like use the law to beat us down, use it to show us our sin and torment us – declaring how hopelessly lost we are.

Jesus uses the Law to proclaim to us how great His victory is.

God’s own Son slew bitter death for us in order that we might be freed from sin and death, so that we might live forever. The words of forgiveness you hear, are the words bought and paid for with His life given unto death upon the cross.

The bread you eat is Christ’s body pierced to free you from sin.

The cup you drink is Christ’s blood poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

God in flesh, Jesus Christ, is the outward context of the forgiveness of your sin. The Word of forgiveness spoken and proclaimed to you…

in the meal you eat and drink poured into you…

is the depth of that forgiveness He purchased.

You are made new in Christ. Christ is in you and you are in Him. This is the great depth of God for you – Jesus Christ – and Him unto life everlasting. Your life everlasting.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.