

February 16, 2014

**Scripture Lessons** ~ Deuteronomy 30:15-20  
Matthew 5:21-37

**Sermon**      *From the Heart*

Well we made it through Valentine's Day again. In fact, I saw an awful lot of husbands that were in big trouble down at Safeway the evening of Valentine's Day. There wasn't a red rose to be found down there. We make a lot out of Valentine's Day. We make a lot out of the things of the heart; cards and chocolate, candle light dinners, dozens of roses and of course those awful pink hearts and cupids. They make me shiver. And all of this in the name of romance; and all of this in the name of love; all of this from the heart we say. Now don't get me wrong there is a lot to be said for romance and courtship and tangible expressions of care and concern in our relationships. And there is an awfully lot to be said especially about chocolate. But if we are not careful and this is the only thing that comes to mind when we think of love and or when we speak of things that come from our heart then I think such things can become diminished in the process. And those things that are truly loving and sincere and heartfelt can be reduced to a whole lot of mush.

Not so with what scholars called Jesus' antithesis which formed the bulk of Matthew 5 from the Sermon on the Mount and from the Gospel lesson for today. There is nothing mushy or nothing sentimental here for in these important verses. Jesus reminds us that a faith that doesn't come from our heart and is not based on love both strongly felt and boldly acted upon is really not a faith at all. Let see if we can unpack what Jesus means here. First of all, that ten dollar theological word antithesis. Antithesis is nothing to get worked up about; it is simply a literary tool that is used here to compare two ways of looking at things.

So in four different situations Jesus is heard to say by Matthew to say something like this. You've heard that it was said acts were true in the past but I say to you not only is X is true and Y and Z is true as well. Note that the X that was true that is past is some part of the Old Testament law that Jesus is speaking about here. In this case the law that he is speaking about concerned murder adultery, divorce swearing falsely or telling lies. Note also that Jesus doesn't come rip snorting into the picture and say. "Hey let's forget about this junk because now that I here and we are going to do things differently. But what he does say is my second point looking back at verse 17 Jesus says, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets. I have not to abolish but instead to fulfill. To fulfill, I think is the key and operative word here. But what does Jesus mean by the

word fulfill. Well we know from his statement that, he certainly doesn't mean to abolish or so killing another or disrupting a spousal relationship or ending a spousal relationship or not keeping our word all still somehow represents a situation of brokenness of God's loving plan for all of us who are his people. But upon that what is Jesus' different spin on these time honored truth. How does he seek to fulfill their meaning in his life and his teaching?

Well that would be my third point and it is this. Rather than taking away from these points of law about these human relationships. Jesus adds to these points of law. When you add it is not to do things that we human beings like to do. Split hairs, complicate, judge rather he adds to clarify, to simplify and to humanize or to take into account the motivation of our human hearts in what he says about the law. So let's use verses 21-26 as an example what Jesus takes about what he says about murder. And he jacks it up about ten times to remind us that not only is the outward act of killing-murder but the inward act of being angry with someone, and the act of insulting another, and the act of venting on somebody are equally in their own way forms of murder. Murder of a person's personality, their emotions and so forth. They also blacken in the heart of the one who act. It breaks relationships and creates disunity in the body of Christ. Further Jesus even prescribed a kind of surprising remedy by reminding us that such murder is not just an affair between ourselves and God but one that also involves our brothers and sisters all around us in the world as well. In fact he seems to be saying that our relationship to God is in grave jeopardy when our relationships with others are broken and no amount of bringing gifts to the altar or dedication to God can make up for such broken relationships. And so it goes to killings, to adultery, divorce and keeping our word and not telling lies the remainder of which we do not have time to do justice to here but which do nevertheless do suggest a little of some when it comes to how we come to how we treat each other and the way our behavior affects our relation with God.

First of all I think, I am safe in saying, Jesus did not intend in the Sermon on the Mount to set up one more rigid set of rules that Christians like us have to carry upon our shoulders day in and day out. The Old Testament laws that apply to the followers of Jesus stand quite well on its own as reminders of what St Paul would say about the brokenness in the world between people and also the brokenness between people and their God. That said I do think that Jesus is saying here that human had it wrong when it comes to the law that it is not just about avoiding an outward act of murder or adultery or divorce or failing to keep our word but what happens here in our heart. How we show our love to others and how we show our love to God in the midst of all these things makes all the difference in the world whether we hate whether we treat each other like sexual

objects or whether we take our word and our commitments seriously do all play into this well beyond those physical act that we commit.

But third before we close, a word has to be said about what happens when situations these when brokenness occur and of course they will occur. People will divorce. People will lie and people will get involved in other people's relationships. People will kill and obviously there are legal penalties for some of the things which we have described but at the very least there are difficult ramifications for everybody involved no matter which of these four things which we have talked about. But I think again this is where our hearts come in. This is where God's love and forgiveness's and that for us and our brothers and sisters all come into play. For the difficult and as serious as it may especially seem in the case of murder and angry, God wants us to turn the worst of situation into good. And second chances where second chances are possible and wholeness where there is only death and brokenness in one of these situations.

Quite honestly I don't know what that new life; or what that wholeness looks like or might mean in every single situation because thankfully I am not God. I do know that it comes from the heart; it comes from the heart of God; it comes from the heart of God into our heart. Sometimes only God can make everything fresh. Only God can make everything new. So in the light of these passages from Matthew's Gospel I think we are called upon then to treat each other with love. Treat each other with forgiveness. Treat each other with forgiveness. Treat each other with a sense of compassion and do it without judging but most of all we are called upon to finally let God be God.

**And together we say: AMEN**