

November 23 2014

Scripture Lessons ~

Psalm 95:1-7a

Matthew 5:17-37

Sermon *WWJD in the New Church Year?*

You know for centuries and centuries, faithful Christians of every single denomination, every single creed, and every single nationality have disagreed about this passage from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, a portion of which was read from Matthew's Gospel for us this morning. Some people say that Jesus is saying that no true Christian will ever become angry or ever become divorced or ever take an oath and on and on through the passage. Other people on the other hand say we all become angry and if we don't express our anger appropriately, it kind of turns on us and it hurts us and others in its wake. Some people believe to give a dead marriage a decent burial and move on and divorce is the way the laws of God and society around us provide for us to do this.

You know as well as I do, that kids often wear different kinds of bracelets that commemorate different kinds of things and the ones that I have seen in the past WWJD bracelet which means, What Would Jesus Do? So what in the world, would Jesus do? We are approaching a new church year, I am reminding you, and that the new church year begins next week. The calendar year starts, of course, in January but the new church year is the first Sunday of Advent. So I am inviting you to prepare your hearts for a sort of pre-new year's celebration. What in the world, would Jesus have us do about these kinds of things in the year 2015?

Certainly we have to approach this gospel lesson noting a lot of dangers that are involved. And the one most obvious is to use Jesus' interpretation of the Torah or the religious law of his day, to create a new Christian Torah, a new Pharisaism, only a Christian Pharisaism, a new set of rigid rules, and a new set of rigid regulations designed to help us to somehow turn ourselves into God's righteousness, to turn ourselves into God's heart. In every case however as we look at each one of these things, it is clearly impossible that we as human beings by our own will should ever be able to live up to Jesus' new interpretation of these things the old law.

Then we must look for a different way to apply, I think, to what Jesus is saying to us in this passage of scripture. I would like to suggest to you that one is to view these words of the Sermon on the Mount is to see them as offering a new way of understanding how we are to live as people of the new Covenant; the people of the New Testament; the people of the Good News of Jesus that we like to throw around when we do witness to other people. What does that Good News mean as

we live out our lives? I would like to say that in this new life that each person is primarily concerned with his or her own personal keeping of the laws of Moses and focus on ourselves and how we meticulously figure all these things out. Instead I think, each person will think first about how his or her actions will affect others around us and in turn we will try to show that concern for others in the way that we act toward each person. I would like to have you imagine this little scene, it is as though Jesus stands between each individual, each person and the other person as a kind of connecting rod between us and this new way of looking at life can somehow transform that other person for us and in turn our attitudes toward that person into an attitude of love, and of care. In the light of the new vision, we can kind of grasp how remaining angry with other person from time immemorial which happens often times amongst family and friends and makes us libel to what Jesus says is God's judgment in this case. If we realize how God loves both myself and that other person I may actually be able find the kind of strength necessary to allow that anger to dissolve in love. If I look first to God that loved that person that angered me so much but as water evaporates from the sun that shines after the rain so my anger might just evaporate in the sunlight of God's love for myself and that other person. If I can only just give God's love a chance.

Those of you that have children as a parent, I have often known this to happen when I get angry with my own kids; when I have taken the time to step back from anger and looked more objectively at the situation then all it needs is to take from those crazy boys a funny grin, a silly grin or something to disarm or otherwise an ugly kind of situation between parent and child.

As for this word called lust, it is not my favorite word; I prefer to expand that word to say treating people as things or objects and not people. Jesus is saying, I think, it must be willed from the heart; it must come from the inside, in order to create action inside out.

Now you guys, men in our culture and perhaps in other cultures are often taught either formally or informally that the large part of proving our masculinity or youthfulness or virility comes in having lustful urges and attitudes toward women. In fact recently I noticed in a experiment that was done in New York City where this beautiful well dressed young lady was simply walking down the side walk in broad day light in the city and within an hour's period of time, a 100 cat calls from men along the side walk was reported as this poor woman just simply walked from one building to another down the street of New York City. Women on the other hand are not traditionally molded in this way. When we do see a woman for example on television who behaves in this kind of manner it sort of seems a little comic or a bit out of place. Instead unfortunately woman has often been taught to be impressed by the way men behave in this kind of thing. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus challenges both sexes, excuse me for being blunt "to grow up"

where this kind of behavior is concerned and that a loving response is to treat people as people and not to treat them as objects or things to be used.

Now regarding divorce Jesus would have us remember the history in context that in his day such a separation was something over which men only had control and often for most trivial of reasons .Or in the court of incidences of where a wife was dismissed for snoring too loudly. How many of you ladies would be dismissed for .No, I don't want to know that; that is more information than I want to know .But seriously the stories of wives shamed in public or even if they were given a bill of divorce left them with few viable options for any kind of life after that marriage was concluded. Now fortunately that such is not often the case in divorce in western culture. And in this passage, Jesus is saying, the men who sought divorce in a unilateral way that they should regard their wives with more human dignity before God and not divorce them lightly as was fully permitted by the law of the day. And the same goes for both sexes in our own day but the time that things had escalated in the end result often the matter of choosing the lesser of two evils-divorce or constant destruction behavior that occurred sometimes in a bad marriage and as a result many Christians today, of course, recognize the freedom of faithful people toward divorce and remarry. The important thing here is this especially where children are concerned that the quality of life created in the wake of divorce as we work toward getting a fresh new start, is the important thing; with an attitude of care and an attitude of compassion in the long run.

Now finally of this whole idea of oath taking, the last of the issues raised in today's gospel lesson is inappropriate for people in God's new kingdom, Jesus is saying, because people should act as God acts. With God's word and deed are the same thing God's people then should taken at their word and then act upon that word without any kind of extraordinary measures for guaranteeing that the truth comes forth in any given situation but then again, if we think about all of these things. If we think about anger, if we think about lust; if we think about divorce. If we think about swearing oaths, who of us can love as God loves, who of us can act upon the spoken word as faithfully as God acts upon the spoken word. Again the point is only in admitting our weakness; only in the process of admitting our need of forgiveness that we find the grace we need, and that is the operative word grace, to see ourselves and others as participates in this new life which Jesus came to give beginning with us on this earth and extending far into next life that we look forward to do. So may God grant us grace and the teachings of Jesus on the Sermon on the Mount to finding the answer to that question that we posed at the beginning? What in the world, would Jesus have do in our lives of faith as we approach this new church year of 2015?

And together we say AMEN

