

## The Ten Commandments + Matthew 5:20-26; Romans 6:1-11; Exodus 20:1-7

Last week, four fishermen: Peter, James, John and Andrew, left their boats, left their nets, left their great catch of fish and followed Jesus, they became fishers of men.

In their previous life, these men knew the Ten Commandments. They knew what God spoke from the cloud on Mount Sinai, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of slavery and bondage and death, which was theirs in Egypt under Pharaoh.

They knew that they should have no other gods but Him. They knew that they should not bow down to these false gods or serve them, for the Lord their God is a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate Him, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love Him and keep His commandments.

After Peter, James, John and Andrew left everything to follow Jesus, Jesus continued to teach them concerning the Ten Commandments and what God demanded of them.

Jesus said, "Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." Jesus' teaching made the disciples ask the question, who can be saved? Who will get into heaven? The scribes and Pharisees were the most righteous people, they spent every minute of their day, keeping the laws of God perfectly.

Like too many of us, the disciples previously may have thought it was good enough just to know the Ten Commandments, but Jesus shows them that following Him means a lot more.

Following Jesus, being a Christian, means that we not only need to know and believe that God exists, that He is who He says He is, but we also need to act and speak and think, we need to live the way God wants us to live, living as Christ lives.

Jesus taught: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. Until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus taught even more concisely, "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 fire of hell.

Jesus' teaching and interpretation of the Ten Commandments is far more penetrating and dreadful than we first thought. Being a Christian, a disciple of Jesus, is a lot of work, it takes effort. That is why the meaning of the Commandments is to love God and love neighbor.

Jesus tells us that our righteousness, how good we are at living, has to be better than the scribes and Pharisees, and this is not easy, it is impossible, because outwardly, they were the most righteous of all. Outwardly, they were clean and pure, but inwardly they were full of uncleanness, inwardly they were dead.

What Jesus is teaching us is that our righteousness comes from within. The kind of righteousness that Jesus is talking about is internal, within us. Our perfect righteousness must be inwardly. Our

righteousness is a righteousness of faith, which cries out, as we did in the Introit today, “The Lord is my strength and my shield; in Him my heart trusts, and I am helped.” Our faith clings to Christ and His words and works to save us, to make us right with God.

If our righteousness before God, comes by faith, faith which fears, loves and trust in God above all things, we are perfectly righteous. Faith, which is a gift of God at our baptism, makes us perfectly righteous and holy before God.

Jesus taught, “If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has a sin 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.”

In other words, if you realize that you have sinned against your brother or he has a sin against you, go to him and repent of the sin which needs to be repented of and forgive the sins which needs to be forgiven.

It is our sin which is made known to us by the Ten Commandments and the teachings of God. It is our sin which makes us unrighteous and unholy and unworthy before God and we must get rid of it. The Law of God, which we cannot keep perfectly and which God demands perfection from us, is our adversary. The Law of God delivers us over to the judge, who is Jesus, who will come again to judge the quick and the dead. The judge, realizing our unrighteousness, will hand us over to the guard, who is the devil, and the guard will place us in prison, which is hell, and there is no getting out of hell.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, hell is our destination if we do not agree with the accusations held against us by our brother, by our neighbor.

We must stop looking in the mirror at ourselves and think that our righteousness is acceptable, that it is all right, in the eyes of God.

We must stop looking at our neighbor and think that our righteousness is better than his, that our sins are not so bad because they are not as bad as his.

We must accept the judgment that we are poor miserable sinners, in need of a Savior, in need of Jesus to purchase and win us from sin, death and the power of the devil, with His holy precious blood and with His innocent, bitter suffering and death on the cross.

We must agree with the accusations held against us and realize that there is nothing good in us, there is no righteousness in us, and we are only saved, only righteous, only worthy to come here, into God’s presence, because Jesus has saved us, fed us, lifted us up forever with His works.

As St. Paul says, “Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?” What Paul is saying is that our sin has been done away with, and we do not go back to it, we do not continue in it.

In thanksgiving, praise, service and obedience, we strive to live according to the Commandments of God and His teaching, that our lives would reflect the righteousness of God.

That is why we make the sign of the cross at the beginning of the service, when we speak the holy name of God: Father, +Son and Holy Ghost, it is then that we remember our baptism when that name was first given to us as a gift, it is then that we remember that God saves us.

When we make the sign of the cross, we are remembering our baptism, which gives us the righteousness of God and delivers us from sin, death and hell. The sign of the cross reminds us that Jesus is in us, around us and with us and the life we live looks like Him.

It is our baptism which makes our righteousness exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees. It is at our baptism, where the pastor traced the sign of the cross upon our forehead and again upon our heart to mark us as those redeemed by Christ the crucified. We are forgiven, we are made righteous and holy in God's sight. It is our baptism which makes Jesus' righteousness our righteousness.

When we make the sign of the cross, we are bringing to our remembrance, strengthening us in the faith, concerning what Jesus has done for us. This is also why we make the sign of the cross when we are done saying the creed, and when we receive the Lord's Supper and when the Divine Service is ended and the pastor speaks benediction. In all of this, we are making known the Lord's death until He comes again.

When you hear those words, "The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make His face shine upon you, the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace", it is then that you can be confident in the righteousness that Jesus has come down from heaven to accomplish for you. In the name of the Father, +Son and Holy Ghost. Amen.