

## Trinity 6

Readings: Luke: 5

From Psalm 34

“Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit. Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.” More about this later.

This is ancient advice from long before Jesus walked the earth. It – like many accounts in the Gospels – addresses proper response to God’s love and call to His people.

Last week, from the Gospel of Luke we heard how Simon Peter and his fellows caught a phenomenal catch at Jesus’ bidding, although they had spent the previous night catching nothing. This would be akin to having played the lottery for years winning nothing, and someone telling you to play these numbers, and you win big. I think most of us would be inclined to ask such a benefactor to give more tips for the lottery, and why not a visit to the river casinos while we are about it.

Instead, Peter fell at Jesus’ feet, to say he was unworthy to even be in Jesus’ presence. And Jesus’ response? He tells Peter to relax, don’t worry, you come with me and we’ll catch men instead of fish! And not only Peter, but his partners came along too! To this point, about all they knew about this fellow was that He could teach, and He sure knew how to find fish. Not much time would pass before they would witness more remarkable events – miracles.

In today’s gospel we hear from this great teacher about what Jeremiah called the new covenant – the effect of the law on our hearts. The passage is part of the Sermon on the Mount and follows the Beatitudes and smacks of a passage from Jeremiah, where we read that the Lord says:

“I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.... I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

*I will remember their sin no more.* Think about that. God, who owes us nothing, decides that He will not dwell on our sins, our failures, our transgressions, our failure to pay up, our thoughtlessness.

Jesus explains that following the commandment to not kill is not enough for the people of God. Not killing, if you will, is the minimum standard of behavior. The fact that one does not steal does not make him a man of God. Not beating one’s wife is not the definition of being a good husband! There is more to it, isn’t there? Jesus challenges us to have some of the compassion, the forgiveness for others that He has for us. He does not rub it in with salt, but on reflection, we must realize that through our fallen nature we *deserve* less compassion than we get from God. We cannot earn the redemption provided by the cross – it was a free gift. Although we cannot earn it, we must respond to it. We must try to do as Jesus asks.

Some of what He asks may seem difficult. We are to put away anger and resentment. We are not to harbor grudges for no reason: in fact, to be angry without cause puts one’s soul in jeopardy. If you have a burr under your saddle and holler ugly words at the first person who bumps into you, you are not following the Lord’s admonition. That’s what we heard in the Gospel when it said “whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council.” Saying “Raca” was rather like calling someone a great

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twit, an idiot. I find the Gospel downright scary when it says there is danger of hell-fire for calling someone a fool. I hope that does not go for calling myself one, since that's where I find the dimmest wit most often!

Jesus says, "So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift," – that if you bring a gift to the altar while you are in a snit with your brother, you should go sort things out before continuing with the sacrifice. He was addressing the sacrifice done in the temple. We should remember that the Eucharist is the service where we offer "our selves, our souls and bodies to be a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice." It would not seem reasonable to make such an offering with unjustified anger – especially for a fellow Christian. Not long ago, I was trying to remember which of Paul's epistles had that admonition. I won't find it in the epistles because it is in the Gospel. It is the admonition of the Lord Himself – more weighty indeed than from the apostle! I can also remember being sobered by the thought as I knelt before the altar 30 or more years ago. As I knelt there, I considered the anger I had for an individual in my life. I had considered his actions reprehensible, but they had long past, and keeping that anger did me no good. As I contemplated the Lord's words in the Gospel I realized that I had to rid myself of the anger. I had no business making my communion with such unreasonable resentment in my heart. "Enough," I thought – Enough! And it was over. I loved Jesus more than I cherished the resentment.

I don't know that one can simply forget an offense – wipe it from one's memory. The Gospel is telling us not to dwell on the matter. Don't spend time and emotional energy being angry at someone for old wounds. As a practical matter, it is not worth getting a bellyache because you are mad at Martha Ann for telling Maybelle Friedman that she thinks your clothes are tacky and your children are about as smart as a dull lead pencil. Martha Ann's remarks were not kind, and she might do well to read today's Gospel. The important thing for you is to make your heart like God's, and not ruminate on the offense. I find that not being angry or offended is a happier state of being. As my wife often says, "Get over it." Until now, I had not thought of that as a Gospel admonition!

The Orthodox Prayer book assigns for Independence Day, that we celebrated as a nation last Sunday, the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter from which we have read the Gospel today. It is an elegant summary of the Sermon on the Mount:

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you salute only your brethren, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

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Although there is no Old Testament instruction to “hate your enemies,” the Dead Sea Scrolls do contain such reference. Perhaps Matthew was relying on those ancient documents for his quotation. The point is repeated by our Lord: it is easy enough to be nice to your friends, but it’s not good enough if one is to follow the Lord. As our heavenly Father is perfect and forgiving and loving, so we must pursue our salvation by following that heavenly example.

I read a verse from Ps. 34 to begin. “Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit. Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.” In the Gospel, Jesus has expanded on the commandments to emphasize that we must rid our hearts of unreasonable, old resentments. We must look at the commandments with the sense that they are to guide our hearts with generosity of thought – not with minimal legalism. If in doubt, ask yourself if you are seeking peace and pursuing it. If not, contemplate Jesus’ words, which always lead to comfort when followed.