

The Sixth Sunday after Epiphany

February 16, 2014

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Matthew 5:21-37

"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca, ' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell. "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift. "Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny. "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell."It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery. "Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.' But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one. (NIV)

I've seen a lot of hearts over the past few days – pink ones, red ones – hearts in stores and on cards and shirts - hearts everywhere. That's because this last Friday was Valentine's Day. Even though I joke that Valentine's Day was invented by Hallmark, it can be a nice day to remember those you love. Kids, did you hand out valentines to classmates or friends? Did any of you buy your spouse chocolates or flowers or take them out for a good meal? If so, why do such things? Was it because everyone else was and because Valentine's Day almost makes it feel like an obligation? Or was it truly because you love them and wanted to do something nice?

On the other side how would you feel if you receive a nice valentine, with candy of course, from a classmate, but that same classmate ignores or bullies you the rest of the week? What if your spouse gives you a card but never compassion, flowers but not kindness, takes you out for a meal, but never gives you the respect you need? Would that be enough for you? You would ask for more, you want more, and there are times you deserve more. Chocolates and flowers may be nice but we would rather have someone give us their heart! Rather than just going through the motions or doing the bare minimum we want to be truly loved.

Today, we listen to our God ask for the same. God demands that we obey all His

commands. But God doesn't just want the outward actions - doesn't just want us to make a good appearance - doesn't just want us to give out of obligation. God wants more. He deserves more. I pray we listen closely this morning as Jesus talks to us about: **Matters of the Heart.**

Our text is a continuation of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount that He preached to His disciples with others looking on. One commentary mentioned there is enough in these verses to cover no less than six sermons. Don't look so concerned however – I'm not going to give six sermons this morning, but will do my best to summarize what Jesus says here in one sermon. Again I pray we see that Jesus is talking about matters of the heart. A common refrain in these verses is this: *"You have heard it said...But I tell you."* What they have heard was an interpretation of the law as taught by the Pharisees and their teachers. But what they will now hear is Jesus, what God's law really says, how these commands are really matters of the heart.

They had been taught the most important thing was obeying the commands – such as do not murder or do not commit adultery. In this way the Pharisees and the teachers of the law could say all these they have kept. They were good as long as they never killed a person or slept with another's wife. But now Jesus shows us there is much more to these commands of God. Angry thoughts are sin. Lust is sin. Holding a grudge against another person is sin. In fact, go take care of it first before you come to give a gift at the altar or as Jesus might say today before you come up for communion. Jesus teaches that hatred is murder of the heart and lust is adultery of the heart.

Jesus is concerned about what is in the heart. Why? God doesn't just want people who look good on the outside. He wants people with pure hearts. For this, in the heart, is where all sin starts – even murder and adultery. Evil thoughts lead to sinful words and actions. Anger can lead to nasty words. Listen to this example Jesus gives, *"I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca, ' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell."* Sinful anger leads to sinful words. It is hard to translate exactly what these two words "Raca" and "you fool" are but they are words of disgust and contempt. We have to look no farther than King David to see where sin of lust can lead. Jesus speaks about matters of the heart.

So what does Jesus see in our hearts? It is a pretty scary thought, isn't it? If we turn sin only into the major crimes or offenses we may not feel so bad about ourselves. We might even start to justify ourselves believing we have a chance to be righteous before God. But then Jesus tells us what God truly demands. God sees even what is on the inside. He sees the anger and the lust. The Lord knows even the bad words we keep from saying. He sees every evil thought and bad intention. Jesus sees what is in our hearts. So what is your reaction as Jesus preaches the law the way the law is meant to be taught? My prayer is it opens our eyes to a truth that Jesus wanted all to see – we are sinners who fall far short of the glory of God. I pray it moves us to join the psalmist in saying, *"If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?"* (Psalm 130)

Jesus speaks to us about matters of the heart because He wants us to see the seriousness of sin. Listen to these words: *"If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell."* If we all followed through on this there would not be many eyes and hands left in this room. But again it is not really the hand or eye that causes us to sin – it is the heart. Jesus wants us to see how serious sin

is and where it leads – to hell.

There were people in Jesus' day who took sin way too lightly. Again the Pharisees and teachers of the law did so by interpreting God's law how they wanted. One example was divorce. They used the fact that Moses wrote a certificate of divorce for those in the desert as a free license to get into and out of marriages. They took divorce lightly and allowed it for almost any reason – one law of the Pharisees even permitted a man to divorce his wife for cooking him a bad meal. But Jesus reminds us divorce is sin. God is serious about marriage vows and except for marital unfaithfulness or malicious desertion divorce breaks God's Six Commandment.

Another example is that of taking oaths. The Pharisees and teachers of the law taught if you broke oaths taken in God's name it was sin, but breaking other oaths was not so bad. They made a distinction between genuine and false oaths. It was really a device to justify dishonesty. But Jesus teaches: ***"I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one."***

Do we have sins today that are taken too lightly? Do we try to play with God's laws so we don't look so bad? All the time! We lie but say it was only a little white lie. We mask greed by calling it ambition and drunkenness by calling it a good time or letting our hair down. We gossip, but who doesn't? We get very creative trying to justify our many different ways to sin against God's Six Commandment. There is a reason we too need to hear Jesus teach, ***"If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell."***

So why does Jesus speak to us today about such matters of the heart? Fellow sinners, where do we go from here? We go to Jesus. Only in Jesus do we find a righteousness that surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. Jesus kept His heart pure, and His words and His actions followed. It is that righteousness of Jesus God covered each of you in at your baptisms. We go to Jesus because Jesus takes upon Himself the penalty for our every angry thought, and lustful look, and broken promise. The One who instituted marriage carries upon Himself all of our sins against marriage. Jesus who perfectly fulfilled the law takes every one of our sins against the law on Himself as He is pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities. Jesus, as the only one to always take sin seriously, suffers the hell our sins deserve as He was forsaken and cut off by God on the cross. So now we will never be cut off. We have Jesus' empty tomb as proof of this.

These words before us this morning can be tough to take – because they are meant to hit us right between the eyes. But remember this: The more the law stings – the more the Gospel soothes. The sharper the preaching of the law – the sweeter the message of life and forgiveness in Christ Jesus! Listen carefully as Jesus speaks today about matters of the heart. Only Jesus is able to give to us what we all need – a new heart. We want more than just flowers and chocolates and a nice meal once in a while. We want true love. So does God. Thankfully, we love because He first loved us. So give God not just what looks good to others on the outside, not out of mere obligation, give God what He deserves – your obedience - your love - your heart! Even though Valentine's Day is past I pray I continue to see hearts everywhere. Amen.

