

## Matthew 5:21-37

<sup>21</sup>“You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not murder’; and ‘whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.’ <sup>22</sup>But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, ‘You fool,’ you will be liable to the hell of fire. <sup>23</sup>So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, <sup>24</sup>leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. <sup>25</sup>Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. <sup>26</sup>Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

<sup>27</sup>“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ <sup>28</sup>But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. <sup>29</sup>If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. <sup>30</sup>And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell. <sup>31</sup>“It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ <sup>32</sup>But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

<sup>33</sup>“Again, you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows you have made to the Lord.’ <sup>34</sup>But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, <sup>35</sup>or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. <sup>36</sup>And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. <sup>37</sup>Let your word be ‘Yes, Yes’ or ‘No, No’; anything more than this comes from the evil one.

## Sermon – February 16, 2020 – Epiphany 6

**... if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, <sup>24</sup>leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift...**

This morning I am going to talk to you about making peace in our relationships.

Valentines Day was Friday. You have all seen the red hearts in the stores. They appeared the day after Christmas, it seems. Valentines Day is a celebration of love. On a down note, the Roman Catholic Church dropped St Valentine from its calendar back in the 1960's because they didn't have enough information about him. Nevertheless we still celebrate Saint Valentine's Day with great enthusiasm. I think it is the biggest day in the year for florists and romantic bouquets.

You must have seen the candy hearts with messages printed on them? They say "Be Mine", "Yours Forever," "True Love," "Hugs and Kisses," "Ever After," But if you pop one in your mouth, soon, the letters disappear. The pledge of 'Yours forever', or 'True Love', is only on the surface and disappears. On the other hand, Tim reminded me about English rock candy, bought in seaside towns. It is a long cylinder of hard candy with an image and the place's name printed not just on the surface, but right through the candy. Jesus calls us in this morning's Gospel, to be like the rock candy. Jesus calls to let the law sink in, beyond the surface, right into the centre.

This morning's Gospel is part of the Sermon on the Mount. Some say the Sermon on the Mount is really a mixed gathering of the teachings of Jesus; a collection of sayings about Jewish law that Jesus said on different occasions which have been connected into one discourse. Matthew is trying to explain the relationship between the Jewish law, the Torah, and the preaching of Jesus. This problem puzzled many in the early Christian community to whom he was writing. Observing the law was very important to the Jewish people. Matthew says Jesus fulfilled the law instead of replacing it. Fulfilling means that Jesus, in his life and his final sacrifice for us, brought to fullness the law previously given to the Hebrew people. He brought the law alive and went beyond it. The law no longer lay on stone tablets, the law was alive, embodied in flesh and blood, in peoples' hearts.

The Jewish people knew murder was prohibited by the law. We know this too. We can easily feel this law does not speak to us because we are not murderers. The people know what the law has to say about murder, but there is no specific teaching in the Torah law about anger. Jesus raises it.

“... if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment;...” The comparison he makes is clear. Murder is serious and so is anger. There is a need in the first-century church of St Matthew to look at relationships and how individuals treat each other. In today’s church, relationships and how people treat each other are just as important. Do we value the lives of others? Do we respect and hold one another in reverence? This perhaps is the heart of the matter in the text. Thomas Long writes on relationships and how they are being redefined in the text: "The Old Testament Law condemned murder (Exod. 20:13; Deut. 5:18), but at the heart of this law lies a respect for the life of another, regard for the right of another to be, reverence for another as the creation of God" (*Matthew, Westminster Bible Companion*). The text goes as far as encouraging those who are not treated well to reach out for reconciliation.

This text about leaving your gift at the altar always catches my attention. Before you lay your gift on the altar, if you know of someone who has something against you, go first and be reconciled and **then** place your gift on the altar. The gift on the altar would have been a sacrifice brought and offered to receive spiritual cleansing. Jesus’ call is for us first to reconcile and make peace. Jesus’ call is for us to attempt to heal any brokenness or damage we are aware of in relationships.

A while ago I had an experience which I will share with you. There was someone, a friend whom I felt had abandoned me at a time when I needed them. She didn’t murder me for sure. But she was not available for me to speak to her. When we did finally speak, it was interrupted. She had to call me back. And then we ended too soon for me. You know what it’s like sometimes when you have a small hurt, don’t you. It is painful and we are aware of it. The pain drains our energy. It brings us down and we feel sad or mad! That’s where I was! Then, on Monday, I was having supper with my Mom which I did every Monday at that time.

We shared 2 left over fortune cookies. And guess what mine said. Now don’t laugh; It said:

**‘It is proper to speak the truth.’** Hummm, I wondered...could God possibly be speaking through a fortune cookie????? Should I be speaking the truth (in love of course) to my friend?

The next morning, imagine my surprise when I read this week’s Gospel

**“...<sup>24</sup>leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister**

The words hit home. Without hesitation but with a little fear, I contacted my friend. I need to reconcile with you I said. What a relief...it was...to get the bothersome thing out! What a great blessing to receive instead the balm of mutual respect and understanding. Afterwards, I was free of it...it was gone. If only we could remember that God goes with us into these uncertain places of reconciliation which we fear can be so hurtful.

We need this in our communities. We need to reconcile with one another, we need to be in right relationship with those beside us and those in authority over us...it is important for healthy hearts and apart from Valentines Day, February is 'Heart Month'.

Bishop Salmon spoke of 'Relational Hygiene' in his talks when he was here a few years ago. His advice - Be careful what you say **about** one another. If someone began discussing another, he proposed they approach the person to see what they thought. He did not encourage gossip.

In a 'Self Esteem Workshop' I once did for young girls...we talked about how real the pain from hurtful words is and how it stays with us much longer than physical pain.

My guess is that we all have relationships that 'aren't right'. Jesus is telling us that it is important to make it right. It is true that sometimes the other is not able or ready to make peace. Then the repair is not so easy. But our own willingness and desire for reconciliation is still a start and good for our hearts. We can pray for those who have closed themselves off. 'Give Time time' seems a very wise saying or as our Bishop Claude, said to me once 'Wait on the Lord.'

Do let us resolve this day to make amends with anyone in our lives who has drifted out of our circle of care. Let us be a community that is courageous.. If you have something against someone...try to reach across the abyss. Communicate with them...accepting with reverence that they are entitled to be as much as we are. Let us be like the rock candy with our message of 'Love' written not just on the surface, but penetrating deeply right through to our hearts. Amen.

*The Lord your God... will rejoice over you with gladness,  
He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you  
with singing. Zephaniah 3:17*

## Notes

Today's gospel illustrates how the Sermon on the Mount is a kind of mixtum-gatherum account of the teachings of Jesus. It is a collection of sayings about the Jewish law that Jesus probably spoke on different occasions which the tradition connected into one discourse. The Evangelist is trying to explain the relationship between the Jewish law and the preaching of Jesus, a problem which puzzled many in the early Christian community to whom he was writing. In effect, he says, Jesus teachings fulfilled the law instead of replacing it

The discourse on anger begins with the condemnation of murder in the law. It seems extreme to provide teaching on anger from that place in the Torah. The people know the law, and what the law has to say about murder, but there is no specific teaching in the law about anger. The comparison is clear. Murder is serious and so is anger. There is a need in this first-century church to look at relationships and how individuals treat each other. There is a value to life and how we value the lives of others. This perhaps is the heart of the matter in the text. Thomas Long expounds on the issue of relationships and how they are being redefined in the text: "The Old Testament Law condemned murder (Exod. 20:13; Deut. 5:18), but at the heart of this law lies a respect for the life of another, regard for the right of another to be, reverence for another as the creation of God" (*Matthew, Westminster Bible Companion*). The text goes as far as encouraging those who are not treated well to reach out and foster places of reconciliation.

"Be Mine," "Yours Forever," "True Love," "Hugs and Kisses," "Ever After," "So Fine," and "Hot Stuff." The logos now include "Text Me," "E mail me," and "U R Special." During the past few weeks you can't have gone into any store without seeing hearts, flowers, and chocolates. That may be partly why, when I read this text from Matthew 5:21-37 about anger, adultery, careless severing of marital bonds, and frivolous oaths, I think about hearts.

I think it's deeper than that though. Jesus' teachings in the gospels about matters of the heart (*lev* in Hebrew, *kardia* in Greek) form the frame within we are to read these verses.

In the screenplay of the gospels, such teaching scenes usually occur when the Pharisees are on stage with him, primed for conflict. In response to the lawyer who seeks to test him, he affirms that the heart of Torah (a collation of Dt. 6:5 and Lev. 19:18) is loving the Lord our God with all our *heart* and all our mind and all our soul and all our strength and our neighbor as ourselves (Lk. 10:27).