

Your Righteousness

Matthew 5:20-26

The Sixth Sunday after Trinity, July 28, 2019

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the legalists, you will not enter into the Kingdom of heaven.

How can our righteousness exceed that of the legalists?

It goes like this. You have heard from the Ten Commandments, "You shall not murder," and anyone who does murder will be liable in the judgment, but I say to you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be liable in the judgment.

In order to understand this properly we must know two things. First, what is the judgment? And second, who is my brother?

The judgment to which our Lord is referring is the judgment that He Himself will pronounce on you when He returns again in glory and raises you from the dead.

The brother about which He is speaking is a brother Christian. The word brother in our Lord's words refers to a fellow member of a community. Even in English we use the word "brother" to refer to our birth or blood brother or adopted brother, but then we also use the word "brother" to refer to a fellow member of the same community of which we are a member. That is why black men call each other, "brother." That is why pastors will call each other "brother." That is why monks in a monastery call each other, "brother." That is why the members of some Christian congregations call one another, "brother" or "sister."

In this case your Lord is speaking to His disciples. Therefore when He says "brother" He is talking about a fellow disciple of His.

In Matthew's Gospel there is a specific definition given to disciples so that you know who is a disciple and who is not. When the Lord sends out His apostles with their apostolic commission He tells them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded for them. I am with you always to the completion of the age." Therefore a disciple of the Lord is anyone who has been baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and who is being and has been instructed in everything that the Lord has commanded for them. Anyone who meets those two criteria is a disciple of the Lord.

Therefore if you are angry with another person who is baptized in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and who has been and is being instructed in everything that the Lord has commanded you, you will be guilty before the Lord in the judgment.

The reason that this is so is because unless your righteousness exceeds that of the legalists you will never enter the Kingdom of heaven. It is not enough to simply avoid murdering your brother in Christ, you must avoid being angry with him also.

Then the Lord goes on. Anyone who calls his brother Raca will be liable to the council. Raca is an Aramaic term that means "Worthless." Anyone who calls his brother "Fool," will be guilty of hell.

And there it is. If you have been angry with your brother, if you have called him worthless either in public or in your heart, if you have called him a fool, either in public or in your heart, then you are guilty in the judgment of the Lord of glory. You are guilty of hell.

Young children in the congregation, this is why your parents teach you not to call other children stupid. They are trying to save you from hell.

Now what do you do, if you have already done so? What do you do if you have already been angry with your brother? What do you do if you have already called him worthless or a fool or some similar such judgment from your lips?

Well, it depends on whether or not he is aware of it. If he is not aware of it, stop being angry with him. And if you have trouble discontinuing being angry with him come and see me and I will give you other Scripture on how you can deal with your anger. It will involve the Lord's instruction that when your brother sins against you, you go and show him his fault just between the two of you.

If he is not aware of the fact that you have called him worthless or a fool, then stop calling him those things. Turn from evil and do good. Seek peace and pursue it. And your righteousness will exceed that of the legalists.

But what if he is aware of it? What if your brother knows that you are angry with him? What if your brother knows that you have called him worthless or a fool? What then?

Then if you are offering your gift before the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift before the altar and go and be reconciled to your brother, then come and offer your gift.

When the Lord speaks about offering a gift on the altar He is speaking in Old Testament terms. He is saying that if you are taking an animal into the temple to offer it

as a sacrifice and there remember that your brother has something against you, like you have called him worthless or a fool or been angry with him, then leave the animal in the temple in front of the altar and first be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift.

When the Lord commands this He solves a major problem the Old Testament.

In the Old Testament God commanded His people to make animal sacrifices. God promised that the animal sacrifices forgave them of their sins. As soon as the blood of the sacrifices was spilt and the fat of the sacrifice was burned, the person making the offering was forgiven.

It gave people in the Old Testament a way of obtaining the forgiveness of sins from God, enabling them to stand in His presence, and be accepted by Him.

The problem in the Old Testament is that God spends a lot of time condemning them for their sacrifices. If I were an Israelite in the Old Testament, I would be confused. "God, you commanded me to make these sacrifices. You promised me I would be forgiven when I made them. Why are You so angry with our sacrifices?" The prophets are happy to answer this question. The reason that God is displeased with the Old Testament sacrifices is because the people who offered them were impenitent. In other words they viewed the forgiveness that the sacrifices gave them as get out of jail free cards with God. They were making the sacrifices not to be free from their sins which was the intent, but rather so that they would have an excuse to continue in their sin! No wonder God condemned them.

If you offering your gift before the altar of God thinking that God will forgive you automatically so that you may have an excuse to keep on being angry with your brother or calling him worthless or calling him a fool, then your offering is worthless. You will not be forgiven of anything. You will be liable to hell fire.

Now that is the Old Testament. We do not make animal sacrifices in the New Testament. Is there anything in the New Testament that is equivalent to the Old Testament sacrifices to which our Lord's words apply? As it turns out there is something. It is the Sacrament of the Altar.

In the Old Testament it was the priest who made the actual offering on the altar. They burned the parts of the animal that God commanded them to burn. They sprinkled the blood where God told them to sprinkle the blood. Then God told them to eat certain parts of the sacrifice for the sake of making them holy.

You are the New Testament priests of God. Each and every disciple of Jesus is also His priest. The priests of the Old Testament were washed and purified before becoming priests. You were washed into the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit thereby purifying you to be priests. In the Sacrament of the Altar you

perform your priestly duty of eating the sacrifice that takes away sin. You eat a sacrifice that God offered to Himself. You eat the sacrifice that takes away sin.

It is therefore appropriate to call the table from which we celebrate the Sacrament of the Altar an altar. Some people call it a table. Is it a table? Of course it is a table. But it is also an altar from which the priests eat of the sacrifice that takes away sin. The sacrifice was made long ago on the cross. That is why our congregation positioned the cross above the altar. It is so that we may have a visual reminder of the two sides of the sacrifice of our Lord, the side where the sacrifice was made, the cross, and the side where His sacrifice is received, the altar.

So if you are performing your priestly duty and coming to church and there remember that your brother has something against you, namely that he is aware that you are angry with him or he is aware that you have called him worthless or he is aware that you have called him a fool, then before you come and perform your priestly duty and eat of this altar first be reconciled to him.

And folks, do it quickly. Do not wait until you are in the car on the way to church to do it. Do not wait until you have come through the sanctuary doors and see the veil on the altar and ask yourself, "Oh wow, should I be coming to Communion today?" That's too late.

Do it on Saturday or Friday or Thursday. Settle things quickly with your accuser. Settle it before you come before the judge in Divine Service and the judge hand you over to the prison house of hell, for everyone who eats or drinks of the Sacrament of the Altar unworthily eats and drinks judgment on himself.

Now how are you reconciled to your brother? You go to him and you say, "I have called you worthless, that was evil. Will you please forgive me?" Or "I have been angry with you for a long time. It is evil. Will you forgive me?" Or "I have called you a fool. That is evil. Will you forgive me?" If you want to say that you are sorry, that is acceptable also. And whether or not your brother forgives you, you have done the things necessary that make for peace. You have reconciled to your brother.

Once that is done, you may come and perform your priestly duty and eat the gift that was offered for you to take away your sin.

Now, why am I telling you all of this?

Well, every pastor wants to be successful. Unfortunately we measure success in terms of the average attendance at the Divine Service of the congregation that the pastor serves. We like to compare numbers. We consider large congregations successful and small ones unsuccessful. But the success of a pastor is not measured in average

attendance. The success of a pastor is measured by how many of his congregation make it. On the Day of Judgment when you stand before the Lord who comes to you in the Sacrament of the Altar I do not want him to cast you into hell. I do not consider that to be a success. That is a failure. It is failure on my part and a failure on yours, neither do I wish to be cast into hell either.

That is why I am telling you all of this. Your righteousness must exceed that of the legalists if you are going to make it. And so I am telling you the kind of righteousness you must have. Is it the righteousness of Christ? You bet it is.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.