

Sermon Transcript for the Sixth Sunday after Trinity, July 11, 2021

Peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

I love it when the Gospel ends with not so much of the Gospel. It's always intriguing to try and figure out what in the world are we saying here and why did we end here? Because it says, "Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you're going out with him to court. Lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, the judge to the guard, and you'll be put in prison. Truly I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the very last penny. Be warned. Be afraid. Be very afraid." This is the Gospel of the Lord.

It sounds really odd, doesn't it? How in the world is this Gospel when it seems and sounds very much like the Law and the heavy hand of the Law? Well, first off, in order to understand the Gospel, you must, we must understand the very nature of the Law and what it does to us. If we fail to understand that, the Gospel does not mean what we think it means. To start out, to teach the whole counsel of God, not just the stuff we like and makes us feel good, we also have to hear about the reason why we can feel good in Christ and have hope in Him.

Because without Christ, without His presence in our life, we truly stand before the judge condemned of our sin. And that God wants us to clearly and fully understand. We are born sinful, ever since Adam and Eve ate the fruit and had kids. Not only did their kids inherit their hair color and their eye color, their height and weight, and all that other jazz, they also inherited sin. We have continued that process. We've handed down sin from us to our children, our children to their children, and so on and so forth. We all are infected with this disease, this terror which is sin. We need to understand that there is nothing that we in and of ourselves can do about it to relieve ourselves of the fear of the punishment and wrath of God. He says very clearly, the wages of sin is death. And He doesn't have a comma. "Unless you try really hard, and then I'll be okay and nice to you." No. That's not part of the phrase. The wages of sin is death period. It ends right there. And that's where our effort ends, in death and judgment. Now, again, that does not sound very much like the Gospel.

And just to make sure we understand what the Law is really talking about, Jesus unpacks the Words of God, the 10 Commandments, in such a way that we are left without doubt. He says, now you've heard it said you shall not murder. And the Pharisees are going, "Well, I followed the Law perfectly. I've never murdered anybody." And I'm pretty sure all of us can say the same thing. We've never actually murdered anybody. And yet, I would argue, and the Scripture would argue, that you and I are all guilty of murder, at least in the way Jesus describes it. Wow! Yeah. That doesn't put me in a very good place, does it? Because Jesus says, "If you are angry with your brother, you are liable to judgment." Now, you tell me that you've never been with angry with anybody in your entire life. I didn't think so, because I have a brother. Therefore, I know it's impossible to not be angry with somebody in your life. I also have parents and I know. And I'm also a parent. If you're one of those, then you can be pretty much guaranteed that you've been angry at some time or another. Or if you've driven down 301 or down 75, there's come a period when you've been angry at somebody. We cannot escape that fact. And what Jesus says is, if you've expressed anger, even if you haven't verbally spit it out, if you've thought it in your head, you're guilty of murder. Because how do you get to murder? It starts with anger. I don't like this person. I hate this person. This person doesn't deserve to live. See, it's the impetus. It's the kernel. And besides which, the hatred of each other, even if somebody really deserves my anger, that person is still a person that God created and loves. So who am I to say that that person cannot be loved as well? God has forgiven them. So if He's forgiven them, that means I'm to forgive them as well. Now, that's hard. I don't want to do it. I don't like doing it, But that's where Jesus wants us to be.

He says, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, and everybody looked at the scribes and Pharisees and said, "Now, if anybody is a good person, it's them." So unless you raise up to the standard of that perfect grandmother that you had that never did any wrong, she was the sweetest, kindest person in the world. And that was my grandma. I mean, she was the epitome of a Christian woman. And it's like Jesus saying, unless you reach her standard, you ain't even coming close. And I know I can't reach my grandma's standard.

So where are we left? Where in the world is the Gospel and the Good News? All I've been doing for a while is preaching the Law and condemning you and condemning me in the process. I can't stop here, but I do need to say one more thing before we get into the Gospel. We'll go into Romans where you have Paul saying, "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means." Now, why in the world does Paul have to write that? Because we as human beings do that very thing. Let's see how much can I get away with and still be good with God? How far can I push the boundaries before I really cross over the line and disobey Him? Is that little white lie, is that really that wrong? If I fudge my taxes just a little bit, I mean, come on, they take too much anyway. I mean, is that really wrong? If I'm driving down the interstate and I see a police car and my heart just leaps inside of me and I slow way down, what does that mean? We have to understand we by nature desire to figure out how far we can go without crossing the line.

What God wants us to know is that line is a lot closer than you think. And by the time you think you're getting close to the line, you've gone way over it already. Because it's not just your actions, but it's your thoughts. I mean, the very thought of saying, how much can I get away with, it's already not putting God as your priority. It's putting your feelings and your desires and your wants ahead of God. You've already lost it right there. Paul put it there because He knows human nature. We try to push the envelope as much as we can.

So again, I've been preaching the Law for a long time. Where in the world is the Gospel? And it shows up in a very strange place. The first place it shows up is not even in the Gospel reading. The first place the Gospel actually shows up is in the Old Testament lesson. Some of the very first words that we read and God spoke all these words saying. When we think about the 10 Commandments, it's really a laundry list of do's and don'ts. Don't have any other gods. Don't misuse my name, and on to the Sabbath day, so on and so forth. But when God thinks about His Word, the first word that He wants us to know and remember is, "I am the Lord, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." That is His first Word. That is what He wants us to remember first and foremost. I am your God who saved you. See, there is the Gospel. Not what I've done, not how well I've tried really hard to obey the 10 Commandments, how I've tried to control my behavior. I'm at least better than Joe Schmo over there. No, it's not about any of that.

It's about the fact that God has already saved us, in spite of the fact that we are born sinful and deserve nothing but His wrath and judgment. In spite of what we have done, He loves us and He saves us, because He is a good and gracious God. He desires to be in a relationship with us, and He can't wait for us to get it right, but because that's never going to happen, He comes and gets it right for us, and then gives it to us as a gift. In our baptisms, we receive a gift. Not just the Word of God and water, but we get the salvation. We get the holy life of Christ that is now our life. When God looks at us, He looks and He sees the life of Christ when He sees us, and He sees us as perfect and holy beings before Him. We have been baptized. We have died, in essence, in our baptism. It's as if we'd been drowned. The old Adam, the sinful nature, has been drowned and is dead. And now when we are raised up as new creations, we are creations in Christ. See, we do not need to think that we will receive it in the future, as it says that you too might walk in newness of life. When God talks about us

walking in newness of life, very often we think, well, yeah, when we get to heaven, it's going to be a completely new life. We're going to be free from sin, and it's going to be beautiful. We're going to see God face to face. We're not going to be afraid. It'll be wonderful, and it will be. But the newness of life that we have and that we walk in is today, is here and now. We have the blessings of God. We have eternal life. We have peace with God, because He gave it to us in our baptisms, and we are alive because of Him.

We are alive in faith because He has done it for us. We indeed can honestly say that our righteousness does exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees, because it's not us that we look to. We look to Christ because He did it for us and gave it to us freely. We are called to look at the life of Christ. The Law tells us that we have sinned. We need to know that, because we need to know how much He has saved us from. But then when we look at the Law of God with new eyes, Jesus says, "I've not come to abolish the Law and prophets. I've come to fulfill it." When we look with Christian eyes, with baptized eyes at the Law, it becomes something completely and utterly different. Now when we read the 10 Commandments as Christians baptized into Christ, filled with the Holy Spirit and moved by the Gospel, we see this as God has saved me. Now, this is the best way for me to thank Him for what He has done. I'm not going to have any other gods because He did it all for me. Why would I go anywhere else? I'm not going to misuse His name, but I'm going to call upon Him and beg Him and trust Him to take care of me, to call upon Him in every trouble, to pray, praise, and give thanks to Him. I'm going to honor the Sabbath Day because that's where I get His Word and His Word tells me that I am at peace with Him because He has forgiven me. See, the 10 Commandments are not a list of do's and don'ts for those of us who are in Christ. Now they are a list of means of thanksgiving, of how we can enjoy the life that God wants us to have.

This is the best way to live, listening to these commands and following them, knowing that God has given us all things. This is how we are called to be. We can thank God that He does it in and through us, because He is our God and He has saved us from slavery to sin. We are baptized. We've died to sin, and we are alive in Christ for all eternity. Right now, we are eternal in Christ because of what He did for us. What a blessing and a glory and a peace it is. That's where we find hope. That's where we find comfort.

And so now, may that peace and that comfort and that joy be and abide with you always, now and forevermore, unto life everlasting. Amen.