

# Sixth Sunday after Trinity

St. Matthew 5.17-26

July 11, 2021

*Grace to you and peace...*

One of our projects on vacation was to clean out our storage unit and drop that monthly payment. We donated a bunch of James's baby clothes. That was both happy and sad. His stroller was in there too. We couldn't donate that because there'd been a recall on it. I'm kind of surprised they don't come with air bags and sensors.

You try to control everything for the safety of your child. But so much is beyond our control. This is a source of anxiety. All our anxiety, really, is rooted in what the Bible calls the fear of death. **"[Jesus] Himself ... shared in [our flesh and blood] that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage"** [Heb. 2:14f]. This fear of death is not simply a phobia about a particular kind of death, but it is the anxiety that things are beyond our control. Youth fades, rust corrodes, time slips away.

We can plan, prepare, calculate, scheme – but we cannot control. The Bible teaches us that Baptism forgives sins and bestows the Holy Spirit, even to children: "Repent and be baptized every one of you for the remission of sins," says St. Peter on the day of Pentecost, "and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children." But in addition to this, Baptism is us handing the child over to God and saying, "You please take care of this little one."

The *Augsburg Confession* puts it this way: "Concerning Baptism, our churches teach that Baptism is necessary for salvation and that God's grace is offered through Baptism. They teach that children are to be baptized. Being offered to God through Baptism, they are received into God's grace" [AC IX].

“Being offered to God through Baptism” means we hand the child over into the care of the Holy Trinity. **“Cast all your cares on Him, for He cares for you.”**

One week ago our nation celebrated Independence Day. But as Christians, the day of Baptism is “Dependence Day,” when we declare that our help is in the name of the Lord, and not in any merit or worthiness within us.

Sin is not just an action, but a condition. This is why we say even the smallest child is a sinner, because <sup>children</sup> they inherit our human nature. The whole human race is warped, twisted, inclined toward selfishness. Sin corrupts everything: our thoughts and attitudes, our feelings, our words and actions. We do what we ought not to do; we do what we don't want to do. And at the same time we don't do what we should; we don't do what we would like to do. As much as skin color and eye color and hair color are passed on from parent to child, and even personal characteristics and mannerisms, so too is this concupiscence—evil desire—passed on as a contagion, an inherited disease. That inherited sin means that William Raphael ~~is~~ <sup>was</sup> doomed to death already from birth, already destined to return to the earth.

What could be more horrible to contemplate? So what do we do? What can we do? The daily dose of gummy vitamins will not stave off the monster. You can recall the stroller, but you cannot guarantee the child's safety.

That same death is creeping in you. Pfizer and Moderna don't have the vaccine. But Jesus does.

That's why we bring our children to baptism. That's why we keep coming back to the medicine of the Lord's Table.

That is the path of salvation. It was the waters of salvation that splashed upon ~~her~~ <sup>William's</sup> temples this morning. The means of grace chart the path of salvation.

Now there is another path of salvation that you could follow. It's the one outlined in today's reading from Matthew 5, the first chapter of the Sermon on the Mount. There is a path of salvation outlined there: **"For I say to you,"** our Lord Jesus declares, **"that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven."**

There is a way for you to enter the kingdom of heaven. There is a way for you to escape death. There is a way for you to not be overcome by your mortality. There is a path of salvation, and it is your righteousness. But the bar is high. Your righteousness, your good deeds, your noble acts, must be greater than the scribes, the most learned of Jewish scholars in the ancient world. Your righteousness, your good deeds, your noble acts must be greater than the Pharisees, the most careful, the most scrupulous, the most pious keepers of every commandment God had given.

In the Sermon on the Mount, our Lord JESUS goes on to detail what that will mean. Obey the Fifth Commandment, **"Do not murder,"** but obey it all the way in your heart: don't be angry, don't call someone an idiot, don't grumble about your neighbor.

Just past the part we read today, Jesus says, obey the Sixth Commandment, **"Do not commit adultery,"** but obey it all the way in your heart: have no lust in your eyes or mind, look at no images that are unclean, submit to your husband, love your wife sacrificially.

Pray for your enemy, give away your possessions to the poor, don't fight back if someone strikes you, or takes you to court.

And in case <sup>you weren't getting it</sup> ~~none of those things were sinking in~~, our Lord JESUS sets the bar as high as it will go: **You shall be perfect.** That's what the Law demands. Not a good effort. Not good intentions. Not a performance that's in the 80th percentile, or just better than most. Perfection.

That's the way of salvation that is through righteousness. **"Unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven."**

But there is another place where the Lord JESUS speaks about entering the kingdom of heaven. And in that other place, John 3, there is another way, another mode. There is an entrance into the kingdom of heaven not by your righteousness but by God's gift. There in John 3, Jesus tells one of those Pharisees, one of those great teachers of the Law, indeed one on the ruling council – He tells this man named Nicodemus plainly, *"Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a person is born out of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."*

These are the two paths: the way of your righteousness, or the way of God's gift. But the way of righteousness is never enough, for we cannot keep it. Murder we can avoid, but the anger in our heart has already condemned us. Adultery we can avoid, but the lust in our heart has already condemned us. Salvation by righteousness, salvation by the deeds of the Law, salvation by good works is purely theoretical. For all men are sinners, all men have gone astray, save One: the God-man Christ Jesus.

In Him alone is salvation. In Him alone is entrance to the kingdom of heaven. That's why William is brought to the waters of Baptism this morning. It's why you were brought to those waters, or hopefully will be soon, and why we continue every time we gather to make the same sign of the cross and say the same baptismal words and sing again and again, *"I am baptized into Christ."* For there is salvation, there is life, there is hope.

Therefore rejoice and be glad, dear brothers and sisters. For the way that was closed to you, God has opened, and the flood waters that would have destroyed you have become a life-giving spring. You are baptized. You are holy. You are a beloved child of the Father. In glad freedom you keep the commandments that once condemned you.

*In the Name of + Jesus*

*The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*