

# Sixth Sunday after Trinity

St. Matthew 5.17-26

*July 19, 2020*

We've had a blessed flood of baptisms the last month or so. The rituals surrounding baptism are not essential – but they do reveal important truths.

For example, the pastor doesn't lay his hand on the head of the candidate for baptism and recite the Ten Commandments. Instead, we say the Creed and the Our Father.

Why don't we say the Ten Commandments? Because the Law, St. Paul says, is the ministry of death. What was "engraved on stones" (2 Cor. 3) is the "ministry of condemnation." Whether one comes to baptism as a little child or as a fully-grown adult, we come as one condemned. We're dead before we're born. In that condition, the Law cannot help us.

In that unbaptized, unregenerate condition, the Commandments are like an MRI. It reveals what's inside us. It shows the tumor, the cancer, the creeping death. The commandments reveal that we are not what God made us to be.

That's what the Lord Jesus does with the Commandments in today's Gospel reading. He shows us who we are. The Fifth Commandment teaches us, **"You shall not murder,"** but Jesus says, **"Whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother ... 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire."** The Sixth Commandment says, **"You shall not commit adultery,"** but Jesus says, **"Whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery in his heart."**

Jesus does not come to do away with the Law. When He speaks to us, He pours alcohol on an open wound, scrapes His fingernails on a chalkboard, slaps us in the face to wake us from our stupor. Jesus takes the Commandments and shows us their full meaning:

- You have been manipulative and controlling;
- You have been discontent with the spouse, house, family, and job God has given you;
- You have not explained everything in the kindest possible way;
- You have been selfish, stingy, and greedy;
- You have hurt others by what you have done and what you failed to do;
- You have been abusive and overbearing to others in your household;
- You have not been humble;
- You have neglected the Word of God;
- You have not been diligent and sincere in your prayers;
- Your love, trust, and fear have not been in God but in other things and people.

The Law accuses us. But the Words instituting the Sacraments do not threaten us. The Lord Jesus does not institute the Sacraments with the instruction to pastors to repeat the Commandments louder and shout, "Try harder!" On the day of Pentecost, St. Peter invited the world to Baptism with the words, "Repent and be baptized every one of you for the *remission* of sins." In the Supper, the Words of Jesus remind us that His body and blood are given likewise for our forgiveness. The ministry of death becomes the ministry of life: **"Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."**

Back at the baptismal ritual, the pastor lays his head on the candidate and prays, "Our Father." Who is this "our"? It's not simply, "Your Father and my Father," but these words originate in Jesus. Jesus Himself invites us to

pray, “Our Father.” God the Father is His Father, and we tag along. We pray the prayer in Him, and so we pray in His righteousness, and not our own.

That is what you were given in your Baptism: a righteousness not your own. *Extra nos* - outside of us. To enter the kingdom of heaven, you need a righteousness higher than that of the Scribes and Pharisees. They appeared, outwardly, to be perfect. They fasted. They tithed. They did charitable works. They prayed. They read the Bible. But still, the Lord Jesus Christ called them whitewashed sepulchers – perfect and clean on the outside, but inside, a maggot-ridden corpse – filled with the stench of death that sin has wrought. That is what you are too: filled with death and plummeting headlong towards it.

But what you get in Baptism, that is, what you get in Christ, is an alien righteousness, a righteousness from outside yourself: the righteousness of Jesus. That’s why we prayed, just before hearing the Gospel today, “Deliver me in Your righteousness.” Jesus is righteous where you are not.

That is the righteousness that settles with the adversary on the way to court. When Jesus advises us to get an out-of-court settlement, He is not giving advice on navigating the Roman legal system. The court is the day of judgment, and the Law is your adversary, the prosecuting attorney who will bring to light all of your lies, selfishness, tantrums, perversions, and arrogance. But the righteousness given to you in Baptism, the righteousness reaffirmed to you in Absolution, the righteousness poured into you in the Supper – that righteousness settles with the adversary so that you are not handed over to the officer—the angel of death—and thrown into the prison of hell. You would never get out of that prison; but Jesus Christ has paid the last penny.

So that is why we say the Our Father and the Creed at a Baptism, and not the Commandments. But that doesn’t mean the Commandments have nothing to do with the Christian life. You are given the commandments to do, not as rules to follow in order to be justified, but as the habit of one

who already is justified. The *Small Catechism* teaches us that when we get up in the morning, first thing, we should make the sign of the cross and say the words from our Baptism: “In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” And then, say the Creed and the Our Father, just like at Baptism. “Then go joyfully to your work, singing a hymn, like that of the Ten Commandments.”

You have been baptized into Christ’s death. How can you who died to sin live any longer in it? How can you be a slave to sin if Christ has freed you? How can you treat others as your adversary if Christ has dismissed the charges against you? These things no longer describe you. You died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. Your righteousness is never enough; if that’s all you have, you’ll never enter the kingdom of heaven. But today we pray to Jesus: **“Deliver me in Your righteousness.”** He who promises is faithful, and He will do it. ✠INJ✠

*The peace of God that passes all understanding keep your hearts in Christ Jesus.*

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