



Raquette Lake Chapel Sunday Blast!
February 16, 2020

Gospel Reading for the 6th Sunday After the Epiphany . . .

Matthew 5:21-37 – Jesus warns his listeners that they must be godlier than the scribes and Pharisees, and he tells them how this is possible. This section is also called “the antitheses,” a series of seemingly opposing or contrasting statements, which helps to focus attention on the intent of the message.

Not a Sermon . . .

Jesus: “You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not murder’; and ‘whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.’ 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.” [5:21-22]

These are harsh words, and undoubtedly were shocking to those who first heard them, much like they are probably shocking to many of us today. Is Jesus saying that if I don’t like somebody or call them names, that’s the same as murder? Conventional wisdom says, “no, in our system of law, that’s not the same.” And...I would miss the point of these words. Hate destroys, just like murder: hate destroys relationships, friendships, trust, empathy, and compassion.

But that’s not all. Jesus also preaches about Mosaic law regarding adultery, divorce, and “oaths” or swearing in the Gospel reading for this week. Are you old enough to remember all the condemnation that President Jimmy Carter took when he said, “I have lusted in my heart”? President Carter got the intent of the message; many didn’t. Emotionally acting on lust can do harm too.

Jesus’s antitheses take us to a deeper understanding of the intent of Mosaic Law beyond the “letter of the law,” which the scribes and Pharisees were expert at quoting. Remember in Matthew where Jesus said, “I have come not to abolish but to fulfill [the law].” Jesus fulfills and elaborates on Mosaic Law, inviting us to dig for a deeper understanding.

Don’t we often wonder at admonitions in the Bible, seeing them as strange sometimes, without seeing the context of the times and the intent? I wonder, if when we read today’s Gospel passage, we should look at our own experiences with hate, name-calling, adultery, divorce, and swearing and the resulting damage and violence? I believe if find the modern intent in these verses from Matthew, we can see how the Gospel message applies to us in our times, just as it did to “the ancients.”

Prayers for . . .

- A prayer of thanks for the Raquette Lake community coming together for Winter Carnival!
 - A prayer for healing for all people afflicted by the coronavirus in the world, and those afflicted by the flu in our communities.
 - A prayer for Jim’s comfort (friend from Saranac Lake) who has gone into hospice and for peace for his family.
 - A prayer for healing and comfort for Debbie (out-of-state friend) and her husband John who cares for her.
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