

Sermon followed by Service - April 6, 2025 - Matthew 5:17-37

“The times ... they are a’changin.” How so? Back in “the good-old days,” it used to be: “We’re right; they’re wrong. Who says? God says. That’s the way it is. Amen.” At least that’s the way we like to think of “the good-old days.” But now things are different. Now who’s right? Here’s the way it seems to work: “If you’re doing right by God, there’s a good chance you’re doing wrong by the world. If you’re doing wrong by God, there’s a good chance the world is fine with it.” At the same time, here’s the way it seems to work in today’s world: it’s cold and unloving and judgmental to preach God’s right and wrong. But it is an ultimate act of social consciousness to riot and protest in favor of the world’s sense of right and wrong. So how do we know what’s right and what’s wrong? For many people, it comes down to this: “Who says? If it’s ‘We says’ then we must be right. And what would Jesus say? If we say it’s right, if Jesus were here, he’d say it’s right, too.”

Frustrating, isn’t it? And dangerous, too. It’s easy and tempting to hop on board with the world and accept sin as acceptable. It’s easy and tempting to hop on a high horse against the world and act like hypocrites and judgmental jerks. So what do we do? Instead of hopping, we stand with Jesus. Instead of wringing our hands over the world, we wrap our hearts around Jesus and what he says. And what does Jesus say? In here [the Bible] we have his word for today. In here we have what we need to know right and wrong. In here we have what we need to be ready and able to live a life God calls good.

Do you hear the “but”? “But times have changed since the Bible was written.” Yes, they have. And no, they haven’t. Jesus wasn’t talking to make-believe people in a make-believe time called “the good-old days.” Jesus was talking to real-world people living in this real world - a time of anger and hatred and name-calling, a time of fighting and suing, a time of cheating and divorce and all the smut and smack that goes with all that. At the same time, Jesus was speaking to people surrounded by a world of self-righteous, judgmental pretenders. And all that was going on, not just out there, but in here - in the hearts of God’s people. So, have times changed? Not as much as we’d like to think.

So - “What’s right? What’s wrong?” At the time of our lesson, Jesus’ disciples had heard Jesus preach: “Repent.” They had also seen Jesus and heard Jesus do things and say things and promise things that didn’t fit what they expected. Some were expecting Jesus to lay down the law - against those people. Some were expecting Jesus to throw out the law. So the people with Jesus wanted to know: “What does it mean to walk with Jesus? What does it mean to live a good life, to live like a child of God?”

Jesus tells us: “**Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.**” Jesus didn’t come to throw out God’s law - “Go, do whatever you want.” Jesus didn’t come to relax God’s law - “You know in the Old Testament God was pretty hard and harsh, but now in the New Testament, now it’s time to show the softer, easier side of God.” Jesus didn’t say that, did he? No, Jesus came to fulfill God’s law.

So what did Jesus do? He didn't swap out the old law for a new set of laws. He confirmed the law as useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness. And he straightened out the way we've twisted God's law. God isn't looking for just token, outward obedience. "Do not murder" means more than "don't take someone else's life." "Do not commit adultery" means more than "don't take someone else's wife." If you're holding a grudge, if you're looking where you shouldn't look, God's law has you in danger of hell! No more loop-holes. No more work-arounds. No more paint over rust. No more veneer, a thin layer of nice over a heart of sin. God's not taken in by loop-holes and work-arounds. He's not taken in by false-fronts and veneers. God's not taken in by excuses. He doesn't follow the blaming finger. And he doesn't grade on a curve. God isn't just looking at our outsides; he looking for lives inside and out that are pure and loving ... as he sees pure and loving. And we should be clear on this - God isn't just wishing and wanting that, Jesus is demanding that, or else.

You might be thinking: "That doesn't sound like Jesus. I'm not sure I want Jesus talking like that." You might be thinking: "I've heard Pastor say that Jesus didn't come as a law-giver to put us under law, but Jesus sure sounds like a Law-Man here." Why? Why does Jesus talk this way? Because it's true and I need to understand that. If I don't understand what the law says and what it says about me, then I won't be able to appreciate what Jesus did for me. If I don't understand what the law says about me, then it can be easy to get all up in arms over their sin and think my sin small. If I don't understand what the law says

about me, then it can be easy to think myself better, more deserving, somehow deserving of God's love. If I don't understand what the law says about me, then I can't appreciate what Jesus did for me.

What did Jesus do? He kept that law - not with loopholes and work-arounds and not just on the outside. Jesus kept God's law perfectly. He obeyed and loved unselfishly, with a pure heart. He obeyed and loved all the way to the cross. No matter who or what was against him, he showed God's heart in everything he said and did - his every thought, every feeling, every emotion, always in perfect tune with God his Father. In every way, he fulfilled God's law. Not just for himself. Not just as a role-model. No, Jesus didn't fulfill God's law to show us how to do it. Jesus fulfilled God's law as God's perfect substitute for you and for me. For you and for me he did what we need done; for you and for me he paid what we need paid; for you and for me Jesus satisfied God's justice - with Jesus, "it is finished."

What does that mean for us? When we hear the Commandments and remember how we broke this one and that, we don't need to cringe and cry over and over. When we see how we got this wrong or that wrong, we don't need to beat ourselves up or lie awake wondering how God will get us. No, you get to see the law fulfilled in Jesus. You get to hear God's judgment fulfilled in Jesus. Baptized into Jesus, you get to see you the way God sees you - covered with Jesus, right with Jesus. Baptized into Jesus, you get to hear Jesus, not as God's Law-Man, but as God's Love - "Peace, your sins are forgiven you."

Yes, you get to see your sin and guilt as gone! You get to see you with God - bringing his life and love to his world. Not because you have to, but because you are fired up to be the people of God!

One more thing. What does that mean for God's law? We don't have to hear God's law as out-of-date and out-of-touch. We get to delight in God's law - as a gift of God's wisdom, a gift of God's love. Amen.

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

IN OUR WORLD TODAY ... we see a world that doesn't know what to do with the will of God - Ignore it? Re-write it? Club each other over the head with it? Pat ourselves on the back with it?

IN OUR WORSHIP TODAY ... Jesus rejects all those options and leaves us with only one viable option - be right with Jesus!

OPENING HYMN

"Cling Tightly to the Word of God"

Hymn 707

Cling tightly to the Word of God and Christ's disciple be,
for then, beloved, you will know the truth that sets you free,
the truth that sets you free.

Recall in faith the precious gift of your baptismal day,
when you were joined to Jesus' death that washed your sins away,
that washed your sins away.

For just as God raised up his Son from death by his great might,
so too, in Christ, we now may live as children of the light,
as children of the light.

Be strong! Stand firm! Come, walk the path that saints before you trod,
with ready feet to bring good news of Christ, the peace of God,
of Christ, the peace of God.

Know that his body and his blood will feed your hungry soul
like manna in life's wilderness, until you reach your goal,
until you reach your goal.

Now fix your eyes on Jesus Christ; "Come, follow me," says he.
"Deny yourself, take up your cross; come, lose your life for me,
come, lose your life for me."

OPENING SENTENCES

Our help is in the name of the Lord.

Who made heaven and earth.

CONFESSION

Brothers and sisters in Christ, during the days of Lent, we fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of God.

The time of Lent reminds us that to know Christ and the power of his resurrection, we must also know the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.

As disciples of the Lord Jesus, we are called to struggle against everything that leads us away from love of God and neighbor. A review of God's Holy Ten Commandments can help us. This week we review what we call the Conclusion to the Ten Commandments.

The Conclusion

What does God say about all these commandments?

He says, "I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments."

What does this mean?

God threatens to punish all who transgress these commandments. Therefore we should fear his anger and not disobey what he commands. But he promises grace and every blessing to all who keep these commandments. Therefore we should love and trust in him and gladly obey what he commands.

I invite you, now, to confess your sins, ask our Father for forgiveness, and commit yourselves to this struggle.

"Lord, Have Mercy"

Hymn 652 vs. 1

1 For what we have done and left un - done we fall on your
count - less mer - cies. For sins that are known and
those un - known we call on your name so ho - ly.
For en - vy and pride, for clos - ing our eyes; for
scorn - ing our ver - y neigh - bor. In
thought, word, and deed we've failed you, our King; how
deep - ly we need a Sav - ior. *Refrain I*

Refrain I
Lord, have mer - cy, Christ, have mer - cy, Lord, have mer - cy
on us. Lord, have mer - cy, Christ, have mer - cy,
Lord, have mer - cy on us.

ABSOLUTION

Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, does not desire the death of sinners but rather that they turn from their wickedness and live. Therefore, I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit.

During these days of Lent, let us implore God to give us renewal and his Holy Spirit. May we continue to abide in the true faith and at the last be received by him through the merits of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

“Lord, Have Mercy”

Hymn 652 vs. 2

(2 For) what you have done, your life of love you per - fect - ly
lived, we praise you. Though tempt - ed and tried, you
fixed your eyes; you fin - ished the work God gave you.
And there on the tree, a King a - mong thieves, you
bled for a world's be - tray - al. You
loved to the end, our mer - ci - ful friend; how
pure and for - ev - er faith - ful. *Refrain II*

Refrain II

Lord, have mer - cy, Christ, have mer - cy, Lord, have mer - cy
 on us. Lord, have mer - cy, Christ, have mer - cy,
 Lord, have mer - cy on us. 1 2 *Fine (last time)*
 on us.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Merciful God, with souls parched by sin and spirits withered by enemies within and without, we lift our hands to you. Lead us by your Spirit on the path of truth, and guard us from all harm, trusting in Jesus Christ, our refuge and our righteousness. **Amen.**

FIRST READING

Isaiah 64:5–9

You come to the help of those who gladly do right,
 who remember your ways.
 But when we continued to sin against them,
 you were angry.
 How then can we be saved?
 All of us have become like one who is unclean,
 and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags;
 we all shrivel up like a leaf,
 and like the wind our sins sweep us away.
 No one calls on your name
 or strives to lay hold of you;
 for you have hidden your face from us
 and have given us over to our sins.
 Yet you, LORD, are our Father.
 We are the clay, you are the potter;
 we are all the work of your hand.

Do not be angry beyond measure, LORD;
do not remember our sins forever.
Oh, look on us, we pray,
for we are all your people.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

PSALM OF THE DAY

Psalm 143C



1 Hear my prayer, O God, and lis - ten to my plea;
2 Hound - ed by a foe who crushed me to the ground,
3 An - swer soon, O God; my spir - it faints in me;
4 Keep me safe, O God, and help me learn your will;



faith - ful, right - eous One, give ear and an - swer me.
I am like the dead or those in pris - on bound.
do not hide your face, or I will cease to be.
let your Spir - it lead through lev - el path - ways still.



Judge me not, I pray; no mer - it dare I claim;
Hope - less, numbed by fear, I pon - der all your care;
When the morn - ing dawns, make known your love a - new;
For your great name's sake, my griefs and fears dis - pel;



know - ing my own faults, I trust in your just name.
thirst - y as parched earth, I lift my hands in prayer.
show me how to walk, for I will trust in you.
free me from my foes, that I may serve you well.

SECOND READING

Romans 3:19–25a

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.

But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL

Matthew 5:17–20

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise be to you, O Christ!**

HYMN

“The Law of God Is Good and Wise”

Hymn 637

The law of God is good and wise and sets his will before our eyes,
shows us the way of righteousness,
and dooms to death when we transgress.

Its light of holiness imparts the knowledge of our sinful hearts
that we may see our lost estate and turn from sin before too late.

To those who help in Christ have found
and would in works of love abound
it shows what deeds are his delight and should be done as good and right.

But those who scornfully disdain God's law shall then in sin remain;
its terror in their ear resounds and keeps their wickedness in bounds.

The law is good, but since the fall its holiness condemns us all;
it dooms us for our sin to die and has no pow'r to justify.

To Jesus we for refuge flee, who from the curse has set us free,
and humbly worship at his throne, saved by his grace through faith alone.

SERMON

NICENE CREED

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became truly human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate. He suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who in unity with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. We believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

OFFERING

If you prefer to give online, the code at the right will take you to our Online Giving page. We invite our online givers to join in our offering with an "I Give Online" card in the pew racks.



PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

In peace let us pray to the Lord:

Lord, have mercy.

For the peace from above and for our salvation, let us pray to the Lord:

Lord, have mercy.

For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the Church of God, and for the unity of all, let us pray to the Lord:

Lord, have mercy.

For this holy house and for all who offer here their worship and praise, let us pray to the Lord:

Lord, have mercy.

For the leaders of our synod and district, for all pastors in Christ, for all who are servants of the Church, and for all the people of God, let us pray to the Lord:

Lord, have mercy.

For those who bring offerings, those who do good works in this congregation, those who toil, those who sing, and all who await from the Lord great and abundant mercy, let us pray to the Lord:

Lord, have mercy.

For our deliverance from all affliction, wrath, danger, and need, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For . . . [*additional bids may be inserted here*] . . . let us pray to the Lord:

Lord, have mercy.

For the faithful who have gone before us and are with Christ, let us give thanks to the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Help, save, comfort, and defend us, gracious Lord.

Silence for individual prayer may follow.

Rejoicing in the fellowship of all the saints, let us commend ourselves, one another, and our whole life to Christ our Lord:

We commend ourselves to you, O Lord.

LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

THE SACRAMENT

(Guests, please see our communion practice on page 2.)

(Gluten-free wafers are available; ask Pastor.)

PREFACE - SUNG

CW 183

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them up to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give him thanks and praise.

It is truly good and right that we should at all times and in all places give you thanks, O Lord, holy Father, almighty and everlasting God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who brought the gift of salvation to all people by his death on the tree of the cross so that the devil, who overcame us by a tree, would in turn by a tree be overcome. Therefore, with all the saints on earth and hosts of heaven, we praise your holy name and join their glorious song:

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY - SUNG

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power, God of might.

Heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest, hosanna in the highest!

WORDS OF INSTITUTION

Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night he was betrayed, took bread; and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my T body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

Then he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; this is my T blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

The peace of the Lord be with you always. **Amen.**

JESUS, LAMB OF GOD – SUNG

Jesus, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us.
Jesus, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us.
Jesus, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; grant us your
peace.

DISTRIBUTION HYMN

“I Come, O Savior, to Your Table”

Hymn 670

I come, O Savior, to your table, for weak and weary is my soul;
O Jesus, you alone are able to satisfy and make me whole.

Refrain

Lord, may your body and your blood be for my soul the highest good.

O grant that I in manner worthy may eat and drink and be restored,
and, dwelling on your boundless mercy, look only unto you, O Lord.

Refrain

I should not be your sheep, dear Savior; I stray in sin’s accursed terrain.
And yet you pardon my behavior; my faithful Shepherd you remain.

Refrain

O let me loathe all sin forever as death and poison to my soul,
that I through willful sinning never may see your judgment take its toll!

Refrain

Your holy heart has one obsession, one blessed thing it burns to do—
to cleanse the sinner from transgression; so I, a sinner, come to you. *Refrain*

My soul is burdened; Lord, relieve me, by all this weight of sin oppressed!
Though sinful, yet, in grace receive me and feed me as your grateful guest.

Refrain

Within me, Lord, your vision traces a heart of deep humility
that mourns its sin and yet embraces the merit you have earned for me.

Refrain

By faith I call your holy table the testament of your deep love,
for by your gift I now am able to know the heart of God above. *Refrain*

This meal with blessing is abounding:
to poor ones wealth, to weak ones pow'r,
to angels joy, to hell confounding, and life for me in death's dark hour.

Refrain

My heart has now become your dwelling, O blessed, holy Trinity.
With angels I, your praises telling, shall live in joy eternally. *Refrain*

CLOSING PRAYER

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his mercy endures forever.

Whenever we eat this bread and drink this cup,
we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

We give you thanks, O Lord, for the foretaste of the heavenly banquet you
have given us in this Sacrament. Through this gift you have fed our faith,
nourished our hope, and strengthened our love. By your Spirit, help us to
live as your holy people until that day when you will receive us as your
guests at the wedding supper of the Lamb, who lives and reigns with you
and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

BLESSING

The Lord bless you and keep you.
The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.
The Lord look on you with favor and give you peace. **Amen.**

CLOSING HYMN

“May We Your Precepts, Lord, Fulfill”

Hymn 697

May we your precepts, Lord, fulfill and do on earth our Father’s will
as angels do above; still walk in Christ, the living way,
with all your children, and obey the law of Christian love.

So may we join your name to bless, your grace adore, your pow’r confess,
to flee from sin and strife. One is our calling, one our name,
the end of all our hopes the same: a glorious crown of life.

Spirit of life, of love, and peace, unite our hearts, our joy increase,
your gracious help supply. To each of us the blessing give
in Christian fellowship to live, in joyful hope to die.

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COMPANY IS COMING!!!

Join us in fellowship as we will be preparing Our Lord's House after church on Palm Sunday (April 13). We will be putting His house in order in anticipation of visitors coming to worship Holy Week and Easter. We have been blessed to have such a beautiful facility, so in gratitude to the Lord we will be making every effort to make it shine for Easter!

There will be four project teams in place (with a project lead) to plan for and coordinate volunteers to help make the projects going smoothly and quickly. It would be extremely helpful if you would notify the project leads of the area(s) you would like to help with. Two teams will be working outside. Two teams will be working inside. Please join us in signing up and joining us for fun, fellowship and food (PIZZA WILL BE PRESENT) as we work together to prepare God's House for this special week on the church calendar.

Please join us! I promise you will have fun!

OUTSIDE TEAMS:

Tomb setup - team lead is Dan Freeck who can be texted (preferred) or called at 262-995-5658

Lawn & Garden work - team lead is Todd Haefke who can be reached by calling or texting at 847-845-0771.

INSIDE TEAMS: both teams being led by Steve Lemerand who can be reached via call or text at 224-424-9587.

Cleaning tables and Chairs -
Assorted cleaning tasks in Church-