

Matthew 5:21-37

You Have Heard it Said of Old, But I say to You...

Two Sundays past, we went up the mountain together with Jesus. I love the view from the top. On a clear day you can see the land below stretch out for miles and miles. The view from the mountain top is often stunning! On the mountain with Jesus, he gives us a view of discipleship. And what a stunning view it is!

The first Sunday we heard Jesus bestow nine Blessings or beatitudes. These blessings are not the type of blessings that those outside the Kingdom of Heaven would strive for. Blessed are the poor in Spirit, are those who mourn, are the meek, merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, the hungry and thirsty for righteousness, when you are reviled and persecuted for the sake of Jesus' Name. These blessings show us that the life of discipleship conforms with the life of Jesus.

Because Christ blesses us, we are a blessing to others. Remember the order. Jesus blesses first. He died on the cross for us while we were still sinners. We are sent into a world that has lost its saltiness. By being salt and light to a world that is wounded, lost, decaying and in darkness. By being salt and light the disciple brings reconciliation and healing to a broken world littered with broken lives, broken families.

Jesus also warned us disciples that one can lose their saltiness and become no good for anything. This especially happens as Christ is little by little leached out of our lives. This happens in more than a few ways, but here are just a couple. When one begins to separate oneself from the community of faith, where we don't have the care and support and encouragement, and healing of the that Christ's forgiveness can bring. A second way we can salt can lose its saltiness is when we dilute God's Word with the world's ways.

This is what Jesus is addressing in our gospel for today. He is taking on a religion that has been mis-guided, mis-formed. He is addressing a religion that has taken God's commandments and watered them down. It is a religion that has missed the mark. Which by the way is the definition of sin. Herminia is the Greek word that is used for sin. Missing the mark.

How do we miss the mark? Generally speaking, we miss the mark by saying to get heaven all I need to do is keep the ten commandments. Someone once asked me "What does God expect of me?" I told them to obey the 10 commandments. Those are God's expectations for His people. Then we make the mistake by saying to

attain salvation I have to keep these commandments. But in the end, I miss the mark. I cannot keep the standard that God's law requires. I will always miss the mark.

If that is not bad enough, here comes Jesus today saying, "You have heard it said of Old. But I say unto you." Six times Jesus cites these commandments. Some have said that Jesus is taking the original commandment and increasing the expectation. Taking the law to a higher standard. No, Jesus is showing us how we have taken God's Law to a lower standard. We have added technicalities and loopholes so that we can make the commandments doable.

The standard for God's Commandments has always been love. "Love the Lord you God with all your heart, soul and mind, and love your neighbor with the same measure we love God."

Each and every one of these "You have heard it said," are the ways we have reduced the commandments so that we can technically keep it - yet without actually loving our neighbor.

How easy it is to say I have never murdered anyone while at the same time being angry with someone and wishing them harm. Maybe I can be able to hide my anger and, on the outside, I can look so righteous, but inside my heart has no love. I have missed the mark.

But against this, the disciple of Jesus is salt and light. It is not that we think we are perfect. But we can say perfect is what God is aiming for all of us. We come to church not asking God to accept our excuses or factor in technicalities. I would hope and pray for myself and you too, that God would transform the anger within me into a love for my neighbor and even my enemy. And nothing less. We come to receive the gift of forgiveness when we miss the mark that creates in us a clean heart and renews a right spirit within us, that tears down the wall of hostility between us and God and each other and puts us in right relationship.

With sixth commandment, "you shall not commit adultery," Jesus shows us how easy it is to take God's holy intention for marriage and reduce it to certificates and loopholes and treating others as objects and thinking we have kept the sixth commandment even when there is no love.

Jesus goes on to illustrate one example after another. By the time Jesus finishes here I feel like I can't even crawl out of here under the crack of the door getting of

here alive. Then Jesus finishes this section with, "Be perfect as my Father in Heaven is perfect." This view of discipleship is quite stunning indeed.

It is a high standard. It is an impossible standard. The Good News is this. Jesus came into the world to fulfill every letter of the law for our sake. Jesus has kept the law.

I can imagine the view our Lord had as hung on that cross atop that hill called Golgotha. A stunning view this broken, sinful world He came to save. There he was in perfect love for this world and for you He took all, and accomplished all He came to do.

That is what His work on the cross did for you and for me. So we do not need to lower the standard.

Let us imagine for a moment where the OHCA Church lived in complete freedom that Christ has won for us on the cross and the grave. What influence upon this world or this community this Church would have upon boys, girls, men, and women that professed to be part of it. And actually, believed that since Jesus has kept the whole law we need not lower the standard.

Imagine a place where everyone settled their difference out of love and respect for one another. And the peace of Christ so ran through the community that everyone is reconciled with their enemy.

I know it is hard to imagine. But that is what Jesus' death and resurrection has done.

And so, right here in this little outpost in this part of the world Christ has blessed us to be salt and light.

The peace of God that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.