

EPIPHANY 6
DEUTERONOMY 30:15-20
1 CORINTHIANS 3:1-9
LUKE 5:21-37
FEBRUARY 11, 12, 2017

It is normal for us and expected that we will seek to get even with those that hurt us even if the hurt is minor and no one really was injured. The other day when I picked Jeremiah up from school one of the kids pushed Jeremiah from behind. His natural reaction was to push back. The initial push and the push back was the end of it, at least for now. The issue is that they were both boys and that is what boys do. There is a certain honor at stake. Most of us whether we are boys or men need to feel as though we are on top. We always want to have the last word or, in the case of Jeremiah and the other boy, the last shove. I suspect women have a similar code of honor.

Jesus turns our world upside down when it comes to our lives as men and women. Today we continue our journey through this part of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus taught concerning the Ten Commandments but his teaching is about the true intent of the Lord when he gave this gift to Moses. Jesus taught something that may have been foreign to those listening. It might be foreign to us as well. We heard last week that Jesus did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it. Today we hear what Jesus says about the law. Jesus says that we are to make peace with those that have harmed us. We are to be reconciled before bringing our gift to the altar. Jesus also gives us a new interpretation of what our Lord expects if we are to exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees.

Matthew 5:21, 22 "You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not murder'; and 'whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.' 22 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.

Jesus teaches about murder. Many of us learned the fifth commandment as, "You shall not kill." Our modern translation says that we shall not murder. There are times where killing is not murder. When this commandment was given the Lord was not talking about war especially when the war is justified. He also was not talking about defending ourselves against an aggressor. When our Lord gave this teaching he was concerned about good order in our society. He also was interested in our relationships in the community, in our families and in the church.

How many times in a week do we call someone stupid, an idiot or worse? If we don't say it do we think it? Calling someone bad names is part of this commandment against murder. When I called someone an idiot I have sought to destroy that person. Many of us, myself included, called our brothers and sisters idiots or said they were stupid. The purpose was to bring them down while lifting ourselves up. Calling them names was not a term of endearment but was meant to cause harm. It makes a difference in the way we think of others.

Jesus taught that their practice and teaching in ancient times was in error. It missed the point. "Ancient times" referred to the time after the giving of the law and was the common practice in the time of Jesus. Our Lord spoke words that would have caused the listeners to rethink their actions and their words. The Lord wants us to regard our brothers and sisters with love. We love in our words and our actions. Jesus also teaches that we care about our neighbor's life and his name.

Matthew 5:27, 28 "You have heard that it was said, "You shall not commit adultery.' 28 But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Many of us can pat ourselves on the back. We have not committed adultery. We have not cheated on our spouse. We don't flirt with our co-workers. We have sought to love our spouses and to be good to them. What does our Lord really teach in these verses? What is adultery in the Lord's eyes?

Jesus teaches that committing adultery is more than merely acting out your fantasies with a person other than your husband or wife. It is more than the physical contact that is made. Jesus teaches that a man looking lustfully at a woman is committing adultery. He says that the desire to possess another person sexually is against God's plan. The intent of the sixth commandment is that families would be protected. God regards marriage and the family as the most sacred of all relationships on earth. When we are lured away from our spouses and our families we have destroyed what God created good.

Some might say they have not done things to stress the relationship that would be considered adultery. What about creating relationships with people at work that might take the place of your spouse? Do we use sports or the Internet rather than nurture our relationship with our spouse? Jesus gives us the teaching intended in the commandments. He changes our focus from what has always been the normal understanding to what God wants from us. He shifts our attention from behaviors we must avoid and helps us know how we might cultivate our relationships.

Matthew 5:31, 32 "It was also said, "Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' 32 But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Of the teachings of our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount these are the words perhaps most difficult. Divorce is a real part of our society and has touched most of us at one time or another. Our Lord was not condemning divorce as much as he was lifting the family. Jesus sought to protect the family but also the women in the society. Women were worth little if anything and they had almost no rights. A husband could divorce his wife for little or no reason. The woman would be sent away and may have been regarded with contempt because she was divorced. Our Lord seeks lift women and to protect them. In these verse Jesus puts much of the responsibility on the men. The men are to remain upright and honorable when it comes to the family. A man was to love his wife as Christ loved the church. This was always the expectation of marriage.

Divorce was not part of God's plan for the family but forgiveness has always been what God offers. Divorce is part of our world but God seeks to set us back on our feet and provides a fresh beginning and blesses us with new life. Divorce must never be an easy way out. Husbands and wives must seek to preserve what God has joined. There are times when divorce is the better option but it must never be the easy way out.

Jesus wants us to live honorable and honest lives. In our words and in our actions we are to be trustworthy. We are to remember whose we are and what we are about. We share our witness in the world and we share the message of salvation. We are to live our lives for the Lord. AMEN