

Matthew 5:21-22

Do No Harm - And Don't Forget to Help (5<sup>th</sup> Commandment)

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost (Series C, Proper 24)

October 20, 2019

Lessons for the Day: Genesis 32:22–30; 2 Timothy 3:14–4:5; Luke 18:1–8

*“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.”*

*You shall not murder.*

*What does this mean?*

*We should fear and love God so that we do not hurt or harm our neighbour in his body, but help and support him in every physical need. (Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation, p. 85)*

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

Martin Luther is credited with preparing questions for those who intend to go the Sacrament. These are part of the catechism, and are on p. 329 of our hymnal as well. The first two questions ask: “1. Do you believe that you are a sinner? Yes, I believe it. I am a sinner. 2. How do you know this? From the Ten Commandments, which I have not kept.” In our liturgy today, we have already spoken those words of Scripture that tell us: **“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”** (1 John 1:8, ESV) Yet today we are looking at the first of three commandments that most people will deny they have broken. I’ve heard more than a few people say over the years, “I’m not a sinner. I’ve never killed anyone. I’ve never cheated on my spouse. I’ve never stolen anything.”

Even if people think they haven’t broken these three commandments, we all have to remember that God has given us Ten Commandments. More importantly, Jesus points out in the Sermon on the Mount that our superficial view of the commandments is not what God expects. We all have broken all the commandments. Jesus specifically points out that there is more to the 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment than simply murdering someone. We are to *do no harm*. We are to help and befriend our neighbour in every bodily need.

When it comes to the 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment, we tend to think it applies only to those who have deliberately ended the life of someone. At a prom in New Jersey an 18 year old girl excused herself to go to the bathroom, where she proceeded to give birth to her baby boy. But there is no joy in this story, for we don’t have an incident where a young mother simply went into early labour. Rather, while in the washroom she strangled the child before dumping him in a trash container. She then returned to the dance, acting as if nothing had really happened.

A woman drives her car into a lake to drown her two young children. Two young men kill three people, and then lead the RCMP on a wild chase before killing themselves. Members of a street gang are involved in a drive-by shooting. A suicide bomber kills himself and any number of other people. These are all clearly murder and we see in them a callous disregard for life. Unfortunately, we see that same callous disregard for life in the millions of children who are aborted every year. Abortion doesn’t simply end a pregnancy; it ends a life that has been given and created by God. Our society may condone—yes, even encourage—doctor assisted suicide, but this, too, takes ends a life created by God. God says that the authority of life and death belong to Him: **“See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand.”** (Deuteronomy 32:39, ESV) In all of these situations, and in countless others like them, we see people wilfully, blatantly, knowingly violating God’s command: ***You shall not murder.***

Before we still think we can pat ourselves on the back because we are not like these evildoers, we need to know that we all have broken this commandment. While it is true that we may have never fired a gun at someone or deliberately poisoned their food, we still need to acknowledge that we have not done all God expects of us under this commandment. The question is not simply whether we have taken some deliberate action to end someone’s life. Rather, as Jesus points out in our text, there is a far greater reality involved. In the catechism Luther reminds us of all that Scripture says about

this when he writes: *We should fear and love God so that we do not hurt or harm our neighbour in his body.* (SC, 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment) In all our actions toward others, we are to do no harm. Jesus even goes so far as to say that calling people names is just as bad as hitting them or stabbing them. He tells us: ***“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.”*** The apostle John is inspired by the Holy Spirit to tell us: ***“Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.”*** (1 John 3:15, ESV) It is not just a matter of doing violence to another person. Our attitude, our actions and our words are to have no anger, bitterness or hostility in them that does harm, or even means harm, to another human being.

But there is still more. Each commandment not only tells us what we are not to do, but also what we are to do. We are to do no harm and we are to do good and to help. *We should fear and love God so that we do not hurt or harm our neighbour in his body, but help and support him in every physical need.* (SC, 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment) God calls us to love our neighbour as ourselves. He calls us to love others, even as He has loved them. Faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord will bring with it the same love for people—for all people—that Jesus has for them. It will do all it can for the welfare of those around us, for the welfare of people throughout the world.

This, my dear friends, is where even we Christians so often break this commandment. While we may not be stabbing people in the back, we don’t always do what we can to help them in their physical needs. And, let’s face it, the list of needs is endless. Helping in every bodily need can mean donating to Canadian Blood Services. It means shovelling snow for a sick neighbour. It means speaking out against abortion and euthanasia. Helping in every bodily need leads us to support organizations like Canadian Lutheran World Relief, as well as our own human care ministries in this congregation. Our benevolence fund is one simple way we can help our neighbour in his bodily needs. Plans are in the works to host another dinner at the Mustard Seed. We can be involved in serving and we can support this effort with our gifts. We need to respond to the needs of others. After all, isn’t that exactly what our Lord would do?

Again and again, our loving Lord showed his concern for the physical well being of people. Scripture tells us of the large crowds who came to Him for healing, and of the patience of our Lord in working to meet these needs. When people were hungry, we see His mighty power at work to provide for them, first in the feeding of the 5,000 and again in the feeding of the 4,000. Jesus never did anything to harm another person; but He did countless things to help, showing His love for all needs and conditions of men. The ultimate example of that, of course, is the cross. There, the holy Lord of all willingly suffers the cruel hatred of men. He endures violence at their hands. He suffers and dies—and He does it all for us. He endured that painful death in order to deliver us from the pain that death can bring. He suffered greatly in His body, so that we would not have to suffer the pain of hell for all eternity. He died so that we might have life. And then He rose again to bring us that life; the life that is so filled with blessings that we cannot even begin to comprehend its beauty and wonder in this world.

There is another lesson from the cross that applies to this commandment. Life itself is sacred. We are not to do anything that shortens, embitters or ends the life of another. God alone is the Lord of life and death. The death of our Saviour on the cross tells us that life—all life—is of infinite value to Him. Jesus gave His life for all. He died to pay the ransom price for the life of every man, woman and child who has lived, or who will live. And that means that every life is sacred to Him. Life is sacred to Him, because God alone can give life. And life is sacred to Him, because He has redeemed all life through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

That, dear people loved of God, is why we do nothing to hurt or harm anyone in any way. This does not mean that we can’t discipline our children, because that is a different issue. And it doesn’t mean that we can’t punish criminals or murderers, even with capital punishment. In fact, Scripture says: ***“Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.”*** (Genesis 9:6, ESV) In this way, God not only sets up the greatest deterrent to murder, but He reminds us most vividly just how important all life is to Him, for He will hold those accountable who do hurt or harm others.

As we rejoice in the knowledge that our lives are important to God we do no harm in any way, shape or form to others.

But let's not forget to help at the same time. Whether it be through our Benevolence Fund; through our support of social agencies that provide care; by our providing a meal at the Mustard Seed; by speaking out against abortion and euthanasia or delivering a hot meal to a hurting friend, let us do good to all, as we live in the light of the love God has for us; the love that moved Him to give His life to save our lives forever. Amen.