

Matthew 5:21-26
Best. Sermon. Ever. - Sermon on Mount:
Anger
Rev'd Brad Henley

Last week we heard that entry into Jesus' Kingdom requires us to be more righteous than the scribes and Pharisees. The scribes and Pharisees were very righteous they were the most learned, the most committed, the most zealous people around. They prayed, learnt Scripture by memory, they gave 10% of their money and 10% of everything else including their herbs and spices. No one could be more dedicated and "righteous" than them. But we saw that disciples of Jesus ARE more righteous than the scribes and Pharisees because Jesus' perfect life counts for us.

This week, further in-to the Sermon on the Mount, we listened to Jesus tell us about interpreting and applying the OT teaching properly. We'll see that the appearance of godliness is not enough, we need **true life-transformation**. The Pharisees and others had a wonderful appearance of holiness, an apparent 'godliness' on the surface, but underneath they needed a deep cleanse.

It's this deep cleanse and true life-transformation that is signified and visibly enacted in Chris' baptism later today. In the Baptism promises today he will say, "I turn to Christ." It is when we focus on Christ Jesus, finding our satisfaction in him that the allure and temptation of sin is diminished. So Chris will say He turns to Christ and then after seeing the love, wonder, beauty, glory, holiness and truth of Christ it makes us notice that we don't overflow with love, wonder, beauty, glory and holiness ourselves. So Chris will say, "I repent of my sins." That means turning away from sin, not seeking satisfaction and pleasure outside of God and the good things He gives us. In baptism the person shows they are surrendering their old life to God, dying to themselves and being raised to new life in positive, healthy relationship with God.

Followers of Jesus are to live that new life, continually turning from sin and pursuing God. The measures Jesus calls us use to flee from sin seem radical. But notice, Jesus is not abolishing the law, rather he intensifies it. He takes the law to a deeper level where the God of the law can change our hearts and lives. Flee from sin and pursue Jesus and we are safe in Him. ...

There is a whole section of hardware stores dedicated to preventing injury. Safety goggles, ear muffs, breathing filters, gloves, steel cap boots and so on.

If you're about to undertake a dangerous job you don't just ignore those aisles of safety gear at the hardware store. You stock up and make sure the gloves fit. You wear the appropriate protective gear or you even avoid the job and call in a professional to do it.

In the same way, we don't toy with sin. It's dangerous, so we take as much precaution as we can. We even flee from it when we need to.

In his sermon Jesus takes common sayings of the time, teaching from the Old Testament and the teachings that grew up around the Old Testament and He clarifies God's core message, taking it to the next level. Today we'll look at a saying about murder and let Jesus take us to the core of the problem.

Jesus gave us a name for the sin that we are to flee from; he gave us the consequence of not fleeing from it, and the wise path we should take instead.

This in no way negates the message of grace ... our efforts to live rightly and to flee from sin are in response to God's great love, mercy and forgiveness.

We try to live wisely because God has made us his friends. We aim for purity and godly living because God has declared us to be righteous.

Let's start with a question: Is there anything more important than worshipping God? Or asked in a different way: When does God not want you to go to worship with the church?

Verse 23 - "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift."

Jesus says that reconciliation with your brothers and sisters is more important than offering a gift at the temple.

In Chapter 4:25 we're told the large crowds of people who were listening to Jesus were from around Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan. Let's take one of those places, Galilee. Galilee was about three days travel from the temple where sacrifices would be offered. So if you picture it as Jesus says, you have travelled three days to the temple and just as you're about to offer your gift to God. Then you remember that such-and-such has something against you, you've hurt them in some way, so you are not to give your gift. You need to put it down, travel for three days back to Galilee, apologise, spend the time and effort required to make amends, and then travel for another three days back to the temple and finish offering your gift. That's at least 6 days delay; 6 days of effort and energy that you put into reconciling with someone. To do that is a big commitment! Imagine stopping on your way up to Communion and then spending 6 or more days making amends, reconciling with someone and only then considering yourself ready for Communion the next week.

In our three Sunday gatherings we have three different practices when it comes to Communion. Sunshine Beach have Communion most weeks, Tewantin have Communion twice a month and Peregrin have Communion once a month. The practice has varied in all churches over the years. While the reformer John Calvin preferred Communion more frequently, the practice at his time was Communion four times a year.

The Bible doesn't make a clear case for frequency of Communion, telling us that as often as we eat the bread and drink the cup, we do it in remembrance of Jesus. For many years in the Anglican Church morning and evening prayer were daily occurrences but Communion was much less frequent. What was clear in the Anglican prayer book was that the Priest would tell people the date for the next Communion service and urge them to prepare for it beforehand.

In the preface to the Communion service in the Book of Common Prayer it says that you need to tell the minister if you intend on joining in with Communion.

If someone had done wrong to his neighbours the minister should deny him Communion. If he repents and makes right his 'naughty life' then he can be admitted to communion. And if there were people who were at odds with each other, they needed to be at peace with each other before they could have Communion. Our time of greeting one another in the middle of the service is not just about shaking hands or giving your mates a hug/ fist bump, it's not just about starting a conversation that you can pick up later over morning tea. It is symbolic of being at peace with each other, and all people; with loving our neighbours.

Jesus and the Anglican Church consider reconciliation with others as more important than worship in the temple or church.

So, I won't blame you and we won't judge you if you need to walk out now to go and make peace with someone. :) Alternatively you can wait until the next song and pretend you've had something urgent come up then slip out inconspicuously :).

But in all seriousness, ... we need to be committed to reconciliation. Jesus was so committed to reconciliation that he paid the price with his blood, for all of us to be reconciled to God. We need to be committed to reconciliation.

I recently heard a story of two brothers. They lived on adjoining farms, but they had a deep disagreement. They had often shared their resources, but that practice stopped; and there was nothing left but bitterness. One morning a brother called Paul answered a knock at his door. It was a carpenter. The carpenter asked if there was any work to do.

Paul said that there was something he could do. He took the carpenter to where the two properties met and showed him how the other brother had taken a bulldozer and created a creek where the meadow used to be. Paul said, "I know he did this to make me angry. I want you to help me get even by building a big fence so I won't have to see him or his property ever again."

So the carpenter worked hard all day. When he reported back to Paul, Paul noticed there was no fence. The carpenter had used his skill and built a bridge over the creek instead of a fence. Paul's brother saw the bridge and was quite moved that his brother would do such a thing. The two brothers met in the middle and embraced. They saw the carpenter packing his tools and asked him to stay a while and do more work. The carpenter replied, "I'm sorry, but I have other bridges to build."

Does Jesus, the carpenter, have a bridge to build in your life? Is there someone you need to make peace with?

We need to be committed to reconciliation. And we need to be committed to keeping relationships healthy.

Jesus took the command not to murder to the nth degree. He showed that God's original intention behind the command not to murder was to live without hatred. Hatred or

unrighteous anger is the seedling that can grow into physically harming or even murdering others.

He calls us to flee so far from the sin of murder that we don't even get angry with anyone.

We can steer clear of it by realising its importance and seeking reconciliation. That is the wise path, keeping reconciliation at heart so that it doesn't come to a court case, judge, guard, or prison.

Of course, it's very unlikely that you or I will feel that we can relate closely to the thoughts and feelings of a murderer. But Jesus wants us to ask ourselves the question, "Am I angry in my heart at someone?" Today, is there someone you need to forgive? What is at the root of your frustration, disappointment, or anger? What is holding you back from forgiving, from being reconciled with someone?

On reconciliation, Paul teaches in Romans 12:18, "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."

So, I'm not saying that you need to be a door-mat, and allow anyone to abuse you, that you must forgive them and put up with terrible treatment. You can forgive someone and still choose not to spend much time with that person. "As far as it depends on you, make peace." If you know you will be hurt. You can and should put healthy boundaries in place that keep you from being harmed again and again. But Jesus doesn't want you imprisoned in your own anger. Anger can be like an explosive that is a danger to its target and can just as easily harm those who set the explosives and innocent bystanders. Jesus wants us to be free from the dangers of anger and to thrive in life.

And the truth is, that Jesus' call to us, is to flee from all sin, not just murder, hatred and anger.

Jesus calls us to flee from the sin of selfishness. From keeping the good news of Jesus to yourself. We are to flee from the sin of abusing the earth that God has entrusted to us. And the sin of gossip, Jesus calls us to flee from all of them. Spend a moment now in honesty before God and allow him to speak to you. Let him whisper to your heart what it is he wants you to flee from and make a commitment to turn away from that sin and turn to God.

We are to run away from sin and pursue God because that is who we are now. Two weeks ago Jesus told us that we are the salt of the earth. We are the light of the world. He didn't say, "If you try really hard you could be the salt of the earth. He didn't say, "If you work at it with all your might you can shine like a light." He has declared who we are, and now we have the privilege of living out our new identity. In other words, Jesus has dealt with our sin on the cross and we are now people who pursue God, who live the new life he has given us with gratitude to God.

That's also what is signified in Chris' baptism today. As he is submerged under the water it is like his old life is buried with Christ in His death. And as he emerges from the water it is like being born again to a new life, a life reconciled to God and others.

In Paul's second letter to the Corinthians he spoke of who God has made us to be and what he has given us to do: the ministry of reconciliation.

He wrote, "If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: be reconciled to God. 21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Can you see the importance of not only our reconciliation with God, but our ongoing ministry of reconciliation. This is, of course, not just a ministry of words. It isn't just mediating between people and helping them be reconciled with each other. It isn't just encouraging people to be reconciled with God. It is about the way we live as new Creations in Christ. It is about the love that God gives us for all people and the way that we enjoy God ourselves.

Author Madeline L'engle said, "Evangelism is not what we tell people, unless what we tell is totally consistent with who we are. It is who we are that is going to make the difference. If we do not truly enjoy our faith, nobody is going to catch the fire of enjoyment from us. If our lives are not totally centred on Christ, we will not be Christ-bearers for others, no matter how pious our words."

The ministry of reconciliation is more than you or I can do by ourselves. It requires that we continually pray that God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven. We pray and seek for God to have his way in our lives and the world around us because this is not something we can achieve on our own. We need God to fill us by His Spirit and truly transform our lives, our attitudes, our hearts and minds. And that is exactly what God is doing in us day by day when we partner with Him.