

SCRIPTURE READINGS FOR SUNDAY – SEPTEMBER 24, 2023 @ CAPC OAKLAND

Matthew 5:17-32
NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION
UPDATED EDITION

[Jesus continued teaching saying,]

¹⁷ “DO NOT THINK THAT I HAVE COME TO ABOLISH the Law or the Prophets; I HAVE COME NOT TO ABOLISH but to fulfill. ¹⁸ For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹ Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰ For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Concerning Anger

²¹ “*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. ²³ So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. ²⁵ *Come to terms* quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. ²⁶ Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

Concerning Adultery

²⁷ “*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. ²⁹ If

LANGUAGE NOTES & TEXTUAL CONNECTIONS

Matthew is one of four gospels – telling the story of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth and his teachings. Matthew is the only one of the four to include the larger sermon on the mount (Chapters 5 to 7) with which we’re wrestling this fall. The context of the Sermon on the Mount is radically important, without it the teachings can seem like disparate moral teachings, as opposed to a radical reinterpretation and recreation of the world.

Jesus has invited everyone to “repent. Change the Way they live. Because the kingdom of heaven is here.” Those that respond in chapter 4 are fisherman, the sick, the broken, the marginalized - those who are overlooked and unimportant in the Roman Empire and the way of the World – but blessed and included in the Kingdom of Heaven.

DO NOT THINK THAT I HAVE COME TO ABOLISH:: the repetition of this phrase, and the way it’s worded leads to think that some thought that Jesus was coming to abolish the law.

the Law or the Prophets :: the Mosaic Pentateuch and the Prophets.

righteousness:: this word also means justice.

Righteousness is the state of being declared right by a judge, innocent, having done the right thing.

the scribes and Pharisees:: they belong to the societal elite, the governing group in alliance with Rome, with a vested interest in maintaining, not reforming, the current, hierarchical, unjust societal structure. Jesus presents their practice as being based on a narrow reading of the scriptures which ignores its implications for wider aspects of human life. (justice, mercy, faith 23:23). Jesus’ teaching upholds the written text but develops these justice implications. The problem with the practice of the scribes and pharisees may be that they do not practice a transformative justice, but one that leaves the status quo of Roman domination intact.

Jesus then gives 6 for examples of how this looks.

You have heard that it was said...But I say to you :: Jesus quotes the scriptures (specifically the commandments)

your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell.

Concerning Divorce

³¹ *"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 sexual immorality, causes her to commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.*

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & EXAMEN:

- What engaged you, enraged you, or surprised you in these texts?
- What is important in a beatitude life? What is Jesus getting at?
- How have you experienced the practice of the Way of Jesus, love and community in the church as too small or narrow? When?
- Is Jesus telling us to be literalists? Fundamentalists in the way we practice the Law and the prophets? Or is he saying something else?
- The teaching of Jesus is simple and profound. What questions does it leave you with?
- What invitation do you hear the Spirit of God speaking to you – *or to us, as a church* – to act, speak, be, or change, through this word of scripture?

LANGUAGE NOTES & TEXTUAL CONNECTIONS

And then redefines them in a transformative kingdom way.

Jesus redefines the commandment "You shall not murder." Exodus 20:13. Anger expressed in violence speech is like murder, in that it destroys relationship and people.

YOU FOOL :: "Rhaka!" in Hebrew – a insult spoken in a very public way of dishonoring someone, an likely to provoke retaliation.

rhaká (apparently related to the Aramaic term rōq, "empty") – properly, empty-headed. This term expressed contempt for a man's head, viewing him as stupid (without sense) – i.e. a "numbskull" who acts presumptuously and thoughtlessly.

v.23-25 Jesus is saying that worship without reconciled relationships is not possible.

Come to terms :: this expression means "being well disposed to" or "showing good will" to someone – it's the opposite of anger. This doesn't mean compliance at any cost, but rather reconciliation and peacemaking (Matthew 5:9).

Adultery:: Jesus redefines adultery by focusing not just on the physical act but on the eye and heart where the sin begins. "You shall not commit adultery." Exodus 20:14 The look begun in the heart leads to lust – which goes against the commandment in Exodus 20:17. "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

Divorce was a power only permitted to men. Described in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 it focuses mainly on preventing a divorced woman from remarrying her first husband. Here Jesus takes a stance to protect the women who had no power, and to radicalize the relationship in marriage to one of equality, and partnership. Jesus takes what seems to be a harsh stance against divorce, in a time in which divorce was easy. Of course, Jesus does permit divorce when the adultery seems to have broken the marital relationship. It's a hard teaching, for instance Jesus doesn't talk about forgiveness, love, or reconciliation.