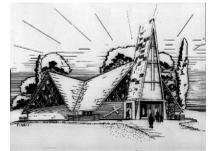




Free Evangelical Lutheran
Synod in South Africa

St. John's Lutheran Parish



Shelly Beach

Sermon for Estomihi

(Proper Epiphany 6A)

Christ came to fulfil the Law for us!



The Word of God for this Sermon is written in Mt 5, 17-24:

- **ESV** 17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.
- 18 For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.
- 19 Therefore whoever relaxes 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.
- 21 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgement.'
- 22 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.
- 23 So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you,
- 24 leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.
- *Let us pray: Come Holy Spirit, open our ears and our hearts so that the Law of God, taught by Jesus, will convict us of the fact that we are indeed poor in the spirit, and that the Gospel is given to us by Jesus, who fulfilled the Law of God for us. Amen.*

• **Dear Beloved of the Father!**

- With Jesus' ministry a new reign has begun, on earth. He spoke it into being. He blessed His disciples and they are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. They are the city which cannot be hidden. Therefore, Jesus commands and says, shine your lights!
- As Jesus sets up something new, what about the old? And if we ask, what about the old, one has to be more precise and say, what about the Law of God and the Prophets, the promises given in the OT Scriptures?
- Jesus says very clearly that He did not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. He

came to fulfil them! Nothing, not the tiniest dot from the Law of God will pass away until all is accomplished. Until heaven and earth pass away, the Law of God will stand! And Jesus adds a very interesting teaching: that those who will relax one of the least of the commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. These will remain disciples of Jesus, but they will be called least, by God, in the kingdom of heaven. On the other hand, those who will follow the commandments of God and teach others to do the same, will be called “great” in the kingdom of heaven.

- This is very significant: Those who will neglect the Law of God, yet still trust in the blessings of Jesus, will be in the kingdom of God, yet they will be called least, by God. So, there will be differences in the existence in heaven. Some will be called great, some will be called least. God will honour some more than others, depending on their fidelity to the Law of God.
- This is supported further on in the Gospel where Jesus does not reject the notion of spiritual greatness, when for example the mother asks about her two sons, who will seat next to Him. Jesus redefines the “great” as those who serve!
- But, it is very clear, both type of disciples will be in the kingdom, because salvation belongs to Jesus, because both the least and the great are poor in the spirit whom Jesus blessed. Theirs is the reign of heaven! We should not divorce any part of the sermon from the heading.
- Nevertheless, Jesus wants His disciples to honour, do and teach the commandments of God! Jesus came not to abolish, but to fulfil the Law, for us. Because He has fulfilled the Law for us, we should not take His gift of fulfilment and therefore dispose of the Law of God like an old rag!
- Because Jesus has fulfilled the Law of God for us, we should come to love the Law of God. Jesus places us in a position to understand and realise the validity of the Law of God. It is God’s unwavering will! Jesus has fulfilled it. That means, we realise that we need His fulfilment, and therefore we will be all the more grateful that He has accomplished it for us. And thus, we honour it as a precious gift which will inspire us to love His will and to as much as possible strive to live in it, not to earn salvation by doing so, also not to complete our salvation- that we have received from Jesus already- but because as children we honour the Will of our Father in Heaven.
- Jesus confirms this with the very prominent word of verse 20 where He says: *“For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”*
- What is Jesus saying here, in the context of the sermon as a whole? We cannot dismiss needing righteousness before God to enter into heaven! In fact, we need an

even better- in quality- righteousness than the scribes and Pharisees! We cannot say, forget about righteousness- God doesn't care about our righteousness, which is the same as saying, God doesn't care about His commandments. God cares about our righteousness.

- Without having a better righteousness than the scribes and Pharisees we would not be in the kingdom.
- Therefore, this all the more highlights and shines the great light of Jesus formidable gift to us, that in Him we have that better righteousness. He gives it to us. He blesses us with His own righteousness because we need it to enter the new reign of God's Grace!
- Now what is the content of the better righteousness than the scribes and Pharisees we need? Jesus gives a few examples to demonstrate what He means [21-22]: *"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whœver murders will be liable to judgement.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgement; whœver insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whœver says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire."*
- The scribes and Pharisees never understood what Paul calls the spiritual meaning of God's Law. They reckoned if you didn't commit the actual act of murder, you kept the fifth commandment. But Jesus reveals the true righteousness required by God with the fifth commandment: Even those who are "just" angry with their brothers are condemned by God. Whœver insults his brother by saying 'you fool' which means, you are damned, deserves eternal judgement! You can murder someone in your heart and with your tongue! Jesus reveals the absolute sharpness of the Law of God, which uncovers the centre of our person, our hearts, minds and desires when we deal with our brothers!
- In other words, do you have such a righteousness that God requires by your own self? A righteousness that requires a right and blameless heart, mind and desires before God? There is no person, except Jesus, who can present such a righteousness before God! There is not a single person who has kept the fifth commandment to the full since the Fall into sin. This is only one commandment. What about all ten?
- So, this takes us back to the heading of Jesus sermon on the mount, "blessed are the poor in spirit". Remember how we concluded that this heading embraces all people, because in reality *all are poor in the spirit!* Well, here is the first proof! Those who think that they can come and make a stand before God, those who reject that they are in fact poor in the spirit deceive themselves by comparing their actions with a watered down interpretation of the Law of God! Jesus reveals the true requirement necessary.
- All the more sweet is the sound of Jesus' heading, blessed are the poor in spirit!

What we haven't got, if we are honest, He gives to us, the poor in spirit! So, we become utterly grateful for His gift, which we need to receive to be "in" the reign of God's Grace.

• And therefore, as fruit of Jesus' gift of righteousness to us, we henceforth don't take our sins lightly any more [23-24]: *"So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift."*

• Because Jesus gives us what we need, we may make use of it. We can use it to sort out things before going to the Eucharist, before going to the Lord's Supper! It doesn't have to remain in the status quo, at the very least not amongst the brothers in Jesus' Body. Jesus' gift of righteousness has the power to effect reconciliation between members of His Body! We should make use of it. Shine your light, by going to the person in the congregation and in your community which you know has something against you. You go from your side and sort it out, make it right. Don't wait for the other person. You go and be the least. Can you see, what Jesus means by shining your light? It makes you small, but it releases the light of Christ in the situation. Christ's mercy is handed out.

• Jesus did exactly this with you. He came to you and gave His mercy to you, because you, in your old Adam, had something against Him. But, He came to you and baptised you in His Name. He became the least on the Cross for you. He absorbed your sin in exchange for His righteousness. This empowers you to do the same, because, remember, you *are* now the light of this world in Him!

• Reconciliation is the sign that disciples belong to Jesus. So, when it comes to Christian life we receive from Jesus the teaching of the Law, to first of all reveal to us that we are indeed poor in the spirit, secondly after receiving Christ's blessings of mercy and reconciliation, we also receive from Jesus the direction of the way we should begin to walk away from sin, denying our self, prepared to be the least, to serve others and the congregation.

• All of this, let us never forget this, is made possible, because Jesus speaks to us, teaches and guides us and keeps us in His Grace and gives us His righteousness which we need to have peace with God. Thank you, dearest Jesus! **Amen.**

• *And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. **Amen.** [Phil 4,7].*

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