

Saint Thomas and St Thomas of the Air Church  
July 11, 2021  
Trinity VI  
rmcneely+

We resume today our Trinity Season Survey of Christian doctrine.

In the Epistle, St Paul takes us back to our baptism  
Where we are dead to sin and brought to life again  
As new creatures of God.  
Death to sin,  
Symbolized by submersion in the River Jordan  
And new life symbolized upon rising from the waters.  
The stage is thus set in the eyes of a newborn Christian  
for a discussion of Christian Doctrine:

Today's Gospel is from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. It came early in His ministry  
In its day, the Sermon on the Mount was radical and profound. It still is.

We will come back to the Sermon on the Mount several times in the Trinity Season Survey.  
In this part of the Sermon,  
Jesus directs us to the Christian response to the law.

We need only a small dose of context.  
The miracles had drawn large crowds  
that began to follow Jesus  
in His travels throughout the Holy Land.

And on this day  
He was thronged by thousands  
He led them into a mountain  
and there gave them this new  
radical view of the law  
and introduces Christian life  
and Christian responsibility.

In the verses immediately before, Jesus has told the  
multitude and tells us,  
that he came not to destroy the law  
but to fulfill it.

And then begins His advise on the law. So here we go:

He says that even if  
we know the law every bit as well as  
the lawyers of the day,  
the scribes  
and even if we are as scrupulous as the Pharisees of  
the day,  
and spend every waking hour trying to adhere to the  
law, we will not see heaven.

The congregation of Jews must have been shocked to hear  
such talk. How could it not be enough  
to know every nuance of the law  
and to be as obedient to the law as is humanly possible  
and not share in the glory of heaven?

Had they not spent the last 1300 years learning the law that  
Moses delivered at Mt Sinai?

and the last millennia practicing compliance with it?

Had not the Pharisees and the temple leaders told them over and over again

that if only everyone could follow the law,  
the Lord would re-visit them and life would be  
restored to what it was before they had gone astray?  
Wasn't that what the Jewish faith strove to achieve?

What was all that for then?

and how could this man tell them  
that even if they precisely followed the law of God,  
that even the most righteous among them,  
would not know the kingdom of God?

What more did He want?

What more was humanly possible?

Was there something in the law that Humanity had missed?

On our way here some of us passed a sign stating an edict  
of the law imposed by the California Legislature;

the California Vehicle code: Speed limit 25.

A clear and familiar recitation of the law.

How many of us have disobeyed it from time to time?

If we could question the Jews in Jesus' congregation  
about the speed law

They would easily tell us that we must obey the speed limit  
law because it is the law and to break the law brings  
punishment. Adherence was the be all and end all of the  
matter if they were to regain God's favor.

A Pharisee would scold us

Not 26 mph, Not 24 mph, 25!

Such was their devotion to the letter of the law

And the duty of good Jews to comply with it.

That it was only by such scrupulous adherence  
To the letter of the law  
That God would send the Messiah to cure all their ills.

But a Christian of a century later  
would give a much different reason  
for adherence to the speed law.

It would occur to the early Christian that  
exceeding the speed limit would be a threat to the  
safety of other people.

He could not love as Jesus had loved,  
he could not love his neighbor as himself,  
by putting himself and his neighbor at increased risk  
of harm.

And that is why a Christian obeys laws.

The Christian ethic no longer dealt only with the veneer of  
the law,

the letter of the law,  
but for the first time,  
A people: Christians;  
were concerned with the spirit of the law.  
And with God's law  
that spirit was Christian Charity,  
Christian love.

We have used the analogy of the speed law,  
the democratic product of the legislature,  
but when we are dealing with God's laws  
we need to check our 21<sup>st</sup> Century democratic notions  
at the door.

The manner in which worldly legislation becomes law has  
no place in church. (and perhaps no place in polite society)  
We don't adopt God's laws by a vote of the people,  
we do not even vote for representatives  
who vote to adopt the laws of God.  
God's laws are imposed upon us from on high.

We don't even have a right of protest, nor a right to address  
grievances.

God's laws,  
the 10 Commandments,  
the two commandments Summarizing His law that  
Jesus gave us,  
are imposed upon us  
They are top down.

It is not for us to question the letter of God's laws.  
Christians are to spend NO time considering  
whether such laws should exist,  
whether they should be worded differently,  
whether there are or should be exceptions to them,  
the way we would worldly laws. Our obedience to them is  
to be absolute.

And we obey them where they are written.

Not in books lining the shelves of law offices

But In our hearts with Christian love.

In our hearts

wherein dwells the Holy Spirit.

It is in the spirit of the law that Christian obedience dwells.

The ancient Pharisees and their modern equivalents studied and mastered the letter and nuance of the law of their day.

They get an A,

but they fail with a grade of an A.

Because they fail to comprehend what Jesus is telling us. Righteousness based upon the letter of the law, the letter only

is failing with an A. For more is required of us.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus offers an example;

in the olden times, it was said thou shalt not kill.

He takes no issue with what He calls the “old law”.

But, He speaks the New Law:

I say that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause

shall be in danger of judgment,

just as those who have murdered.

He points us to the spirit behind the law and He directs us to obey the spirit of the law too.

Notice that it was not against the Hebrew law to be angry with your brother without a cause,

But it was a violation of the Christian principal of

Loving each other as Jesus has loved us

Loving our neighbor as our selves.

He gave us another great example:

If you say to another Raca (a slander),  
that *was* a violation of the Hebrew law  
and you would face the judgment of the council,  
the courts,  
because you broke the letter of the law.

But if you said “thou fool”,  
in the words of the day, it meant  
that he had no soul or holy spirit within him,

you had not violated any law of the day,  
but you would face the judgment of God.

Because by saying to another “thou fool”  
(you are without a soul, without the holy spirit),  
you have committed them to eternal death,  
you have not killed them in this life  
but in the next.

You have not broken the letter of any Hebrew law, but you  
are guilty of violating the spirit of the law  
You have not loved your neighbor as Jesus loves you.  
and will face, Hell-fire on the judgment day.

Christian are called to follow the spirit of the law, the spirit  
from which the law issues.

But, Jesus is also talking about the other side of the coin  
too: The evil motives  
and attitudes which foster wrong doing.

If Christian Charity is what motivates us to follow the laws;  
then it is  
pride,  
hatred,  
anger,  
envy,  
malice and  
unforgiving  
that motivates us to break the law.

He gives good legal advice:  
Agree with thine adversary whilst still in the way with him.  
Love your neighbor as Jesus loves you.

We each want God's mercy  
and so must show mercy for each other.  
That is the spirit of God's laws.

We don't deserve mercy,  
it is a grace,  
a gift from God  
that we cannot earn.

We want mercy, not justice for our transgressions.  
Justice is the opposite of mercy.  
It is cold and it is heartless.  
So Jesus tells us in this Sermon on the Mount,  
that we should agree with our adversary  
where we can,  
in the spirit of mercy.



Because if we don't  
we will be in the realm of justice,  
where we will pay the last farthing.  
Or where we will fail with an A.

So the take away from this section of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount

The doctrine that we should take with us through those doors today

Is this:  
Salvation requires more than rote compliance with the law.

For us, our actions and inactions matter

But it is as important that we act in the spirit of the law that Jesus gave us;  
Love thy neighbor as thy self.

Pray that the Holy Spirit in us will direct our hearts to follow God's laws out of a spirit of Christian love  
That we may know His mercy  
And see the Kingdom of God.

Amen