

Saint Thomas and Saint Thomas of the Air Church
Trinity VI
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Today, we resume our Trinity Summer Season Survey
Of Essential Christian Doctrine.

St Matthew takes us back to the early days of Jesus' Earthly
Ministry.

Jesus has miraculously healed hundreds of people from disease.

The word is out,

and He has the attention of a large crowd.

They follow Him into a mountain where He stands,
raises His arms

And gives them what would later be known as
the Sermon on the Mount.

Our Summer Survey of Essential Christian Doctrine

Has been here before and will be here again.

The Sermon is the font of much of our Doctrine.

Today's topic from the Sermon is the Law.

And Jesus begins with a statement that must have shocked
His Jewish audience:

“Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness
of the scribes and the Pharisees,
ye shall in no case
enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.”

It is difficult for us to appreciate just how alarmed the Jews must
have been.

Had they not lived 1300 years under the religious belief
 That if they could but obey all the Laws
 That Moses brought down from Mt Sinai so long ago
 That God would send the Messiah
 And all would be restored?

How could they do more?

What human could be more observant than the devout Pharisees?

What more could God demand?

Yet, this man Jesus called for more.

He demanded that we also obey something deeper.

Let's examine this a little.

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus offers us an example.

He points to the Sixth Commandment

In olden times, it was said "Thou shalt do no murder"

He takes no issue with what He calls the "Old Law".

If you murder, you will be judged. No controversy there.

However, He goes a step further:

He gives another example in which no one is killed.

He posits a situation in which a person makes

A specific verbal accusation,

In fact, there is no violation of Hebrew law at all

And yet there is judgment.

The verbal accusation is the Aramaic word; "Raca".

Meaning, "thou fool",

Essentially an epithet saying the person has no soul

Or that the Holy Spirit is not within him.

Jesus explains you have not killed the person this world

And have not violated any Hebrew Law

But you have killed him in the next world.

Jesus is telling us to consider not only our actions,

But our motivation, our hearts

And that even without an overt action,

We are subject to judgment for failing to love our neighbor.

We must examine the spirit behind the law and obey that spirit.

On your way here you may have 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 seated on the Mount

about the speed law

They would easily tell us that we must obey the speed limit law because is it the law and to break the law brings punishment.

Adherence was the be all and end all of the matter.

A Pharisee might say:

Not 24 miles per hour

Not 26 miles per hour

25 MILES PER HOUR!

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 21st 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, they know the letter of the law well,
 but they fail the course with that 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.

Notice that is 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.

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

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 the course with a grade of 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