

Theme: **Of the Heart**

Text: Matthew 5:21 – 37

Date: February 12, 2017

Season: 6th Sunday after Epiphany

Place: Shepherd of the Rockies LCMS, Bailey, CO

Grace and peace to you as you let God's Blessings go to work in your life, from God, our Father, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

For the last two weeks, we have been sitting down with Jesus and listening to His Words from the Sermon on the Mount. Two weeks ago, we heard Jesus tell us about the blessings He gives to us as we listen to His Word and let the Holy Spirit go to work in our lives. Last week we heard how God's Word will make us different from the rest of the world. For through God's blessings found in His Word we have become the salt of the earth and the Light of the world, which brings us to the Cross of Jesus Christ and our relationship with God and others.

Now the Cross of Jesus Christ isn't just a symbol of how Jesus Christ gave His life for us so that we could receive all the blessings He wants to give to us, but it is also a symbol of the relationship that God wants to have with each of us. This Cross is made up of a vertical and a horizontal piece of wood, the vertical piece of wood is there to remind us that God sent His Only Son, Jesus Christ, to save us from sin, death and the power of the devil by His life, death and resurrection. The horizontal piece of wood is there to remind us that Jesus stretched out His arms to save all the world and has open the way to heaven for all people to come and enjoy the love of God through Him alone. Yes, the Cross of Jesus is a symbol of the relationship we can have with God. A relationship where God has come down to save us and is reaching out with His arms of love to bring all people to Him for the salvation and relationship that we all need in our lives. Yes, the Cross is a reminder to us of our relationship with God and others. God has sent down His blessings and love into our lives so that we can reach out with our arms to share those blessings and God's Love with others.

The relationship that we have with God and others is what Jesus is talking about in the close of the second part of the Sermon on the Mount, that we listened to last week as He says, **"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."** (Mt 5:19-20)

In the Children's sermon, today I talked about where our righteousness comes from and I gave them the example of St. Valentine. Now St. Valentine may have done a lot of good things in

his life and was blessed to be given a position in the Roman government that enable him to change the culture of his time, but he also knew something that Jesus is teaching us this morning through His Sermon on the Mount and that is that our righteousness doesn't come from what we do but from our heart that believes in all the Jesus Christ has done for us. Yes, St. Valentine gave out red hearts with a cross in the middle to remind us of all that Jesus Christ has done for us by His Life, Death and Resurrection as the only source of all our righteousness.

Today in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus continues to talk to us about the relationship of our heart with God and others. Jesus says to us, **“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’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.”** (Mt 5:21-22)

Murder happens not just when someone takes another's life. It happens through actions against another and even in words and thoughts it happens with the attitudes of our heart. Not all anger and words of insult are murder, but when anger and words and thoughts are intended to hurt or harm our neighbor and not for the purpose of seeking their good and well-being, then we are sinning and this is murder. It is especially bad when we treat each other in the church in this way. Do not neglect your relationships with fellow disciples, encouraging each other to grow in our faith and brotherly love for one another. Do not neglect your relationships with your family, neighbors, community and the world, it all starts with the attitude of our heart. As we follow Jesus' Words and love for us we will repent and turn away from this kind of sin. As we follow Jesus' Words and love for us we will seek reconciliation, which changes the attitude of our heart. For it is the attitude of our heart with Jesus that enables us to have the relationship that God wants us to have with our family, neighbors, community and the world. It's the attitude of our heart that enables us to have a unique relationship with God and with others.

Jesus says to us, **“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 lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”** (Mt. 5:27 – 28)

God desires there to be sexual purity, not just in outward deeds, but in our inner thoughts as well. A life of purity begins in the heart and extends out to our relationships with others. **“If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out.”** (Mt 5:29) Sin is often activated by the eye. What I choose to look at is important. I can choose to turn away, but to pluck out my eye or cut off my hand? Well is Jesus using a hyperbole to drive home the need for radical action in dealing with impure thoughts. It is actually not the eye or the hand that causes us to sin, but the heart. Jesus tells us,

“Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.” (Mt 15:19) So tear out the heart and throw it away. What we really need is a new heart, and that is what Jesus gives to us, a heart transplant by God’s Word through the operation of the Holy Spirit on our heart and lives.

King David pleads with God and says, **“Create in me a clean heart, O God”** (Ps 51:10). Yes, God by His Word through the work of the Holy Spirit can change our hearts so that we can have a new relationship with God and with our spouse and with our neighbors. It all starts with our heart for it is the heart that controls the mind that controls our eyes, hands and our whole body that causes us to follow through in the sinful actions that lead us away from our heavenly home.

Jesus says to us, **“It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’³² But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”** (Mt. 5:31-32)

Divorce is never what God wants or intends for a marriage relationships. Divorce shatters a sacred union that God intends to be permanent and that he wants to bless. It shatters and breaks lives. Marriage is a special relationship that needs to start from the heart, as the heart is keep one with God so God goes to work to make the marriage relationship one with Him as the bonding that can even heal what is cracked and scared.

Jesus says to us, **“Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.’³⁴ But I say to you, ‘Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God.’”** (Mt. 5:33-34)

Our speech matters. Don’t use words lightly. To make a promise is no small matter. Be careful what you say, and let your word be your bond, your “yes” mean yes, and your “no” mean no. Don’t be deceitful. And don’t have an inflated view of your own importance. Rather, let your words speak truth, and remember your humble position before God.

How we deal with our neighbors is a special relationship that God has given to us that start with the heart of God. How we deal sexually with one another is a special relationship that God has given to us that starts with the heart of God. Becoming Husband and Wife is a very special relationship that starts with the heart of God as He make the two one in Him. How we proclaim the truth of our words is a special relationship give to us from God and should not be taken light because it not only affects our relationship with one another but our relationship with God.

So, Jesus gives us a picture of what salt and light look like, a picture of who we are and how we live with each other. Do we sin and fall short of God's expectation for his children? Yes, indeed we do. Confronted with our sin and shortcomings, we repent and confess our sins of thought, attitude, word and deed, to God, asking for forgiveness for Jesus's sake and through God's Word we are strengthened by the Holy Spirit to turn away from our sins and live at peace with one another, in a loving relationship that come from the heart of God we seek to serve each other, as Christ Jesus continues to love and forgive us. It's the relationship that God gives to us through the cross of Jesus Christ as He comes down to build up our relationships and then send us out to share that relationship with other and it begins with the heart of God. Amen.

Children's Sermon: Where does our righteousness come from?

(Big Red Heart / St. Valentine)

Where does your righteousness come from? (Let the students answer.) What does righteousness mean? (Let the students answer.) Righteousness means that we are right with God and have the ability to go to heaven and be with Him for all eternity. That righteousness was given to us by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ on the cross.

In two days from now it will be St. Valentine's Day. A day in which we give out valentine card to our loved ones. It's also the day we celebrate St. Valentines death, which much of the world has forgotten. Does anyone know something about St. Valentine. (Wait for the student's response.)

Let me tell you about St. Valentine. St. Valentine lived in the first century after the death of Jesus and he was a very important man, because he was a senator in the Roman Government. At this time in the history of the Roman world long time ago when it became illegal to be a Christian, because the ruler of the Roman world was blaming all the bad that was going on in the Roman world upon the Christian and was arresting them and killing them in cruel ways. When St. Valentine heard about the fact that some of his fellow Christians were being arrested because of a bad thing that had happen because of someone else's carelessness he wanted to help them and give them some form of encouragement. Since he was standing in the market place he looked for something to send to these people so that they would be given hope and encouragement. (show the red paper and fold and tear it into the shape of a heart.) He found some read parchment paper, folded it in half and then began tearing the paper to make it into the shape of a cross. When he had finished making the heart he found an ink pen and made a cross on the inside of the heart and put it into an envelope and sent it to each of the Christians who had be arrested. This was the first Valentine given out to those whom St. Valentine had love and concern for.

As a senator in the Roman Government he when to the senate to see if he could stop what the ruler of Roman was doing but in the process, it was discovered that he was a Christian and the ruler of Rome arrested him and eventually killed him also. For many years when anyone was arrested for being a Christian other Christians would send a red heart with a cross to encourage and remind the prisoner that his hope was not in what he had done but God's great love for us that sent His Only Son to the cross for us so that we would be righteous in His sight and be given a heavenly home where all the evil of this world would be gone.

Later when the Roman government made Christianity legal and the religion of the Roman Government they made February 14, the day when St. Valentine died St. Valentine's day and the tradition was start to give a read heart out to all those you love and are concerned about in remembrance of what St. Valentine had did for all those who were being arrested for being a Christian.

Let us pray and ask God to help us encourage other to remain strong in their faith.

The verses of our text are part of a larger section that includes verses 21–48. Jesus deals with six commands. Each one begins with, “you have heard that it was said.” Most references are to commands from the law of Moses, but the point of comparison is to the traditions of the Scribes and Pharisees (first century Judaism) associated with that command and the popular teaching of the day (much like the self-centered, tolerant, permissive mind-set of our own society) often limiting the extent of the command, weakening its impact or importance in one's life. Jesus, speaking with authority, goes on to say, “But I myself say to you.” Here is what this command has meant all along.

The six areas of instruction are: murder, adultery, divorce, oaths, revenge, and love. The text deals with the first four. The gospel for Epiphany 7 deals with the last two.

Jesus is concerned with our relationships with others. Our relationships with others are not independent of our relationship with him (horizontal and vertical relationships). Our relationship with Jesus must influence our relationships with others. Broken relationships with others will damage our relationship with Jesus.

Murder happens not just when someone takes another's life. It happens through actions against another and even in words and in the attitudes of the heart. Not all anger and words of insult are murder, but when anger and words are intended to hurt or harm our neighbor and not for the purpose of seeking his good and well-being, these are sin, this is murder. It is especially bad when we treat each other in the church in this way. Do not neglect your relationships with fellow disciples. Those who follow Jesus will repent and turn away from this sin. Those who belong to Jesus will seek reconciliation. Those who refuse to be reconciled no longer belong to Jesus.

God desires there to be sexual purity among his disciples, not just in outward deeds, but in inner thoughts as well. A life of purity begins in the heart and extends out to relationships with others. “If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out.” Sin is often activated by the eye. What I choose to look at is important. I can choose to turn away, but to pluck out my eye or cut off my hand? Jesus uses hyperbole to drive home the need for radical action in dealing with impure thoughts. It is actually not the eye or the hand that causes us to sin, but the heart. “Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.” (Mt 15:19) So tear out the heart and throw it away. What we really need is a new heart, and that is what Jesus gives us, a heart transplant. “Create in me a clean heart, O God” (Ps 51:10).

Divorce, like adultery, is sin. Both violate and destroy marriage, which is not just an invention of society, but a blessing given to us by God even before the fall. See also what Jesus says about divorce in Matthew 19:3–12 and what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7. Jesus confronts the notion (very prevalent today) that divorce is no big deal. Divorce is never what God wants or intends for a marriage relationship. Divorce is sin. It shatters a sacred union that God intends to be permanent and that he wants to bless. It shatters and breaks lives. Do not divorce. Instead be faithful to your marriage promises. Love and serve your marriage partner.

Our speech matters. Don't use words lightly. To make a promise is no small matter. Be careful what you say, and let your word be your bond, your “yes” mean yes, and your “no” mean no. Don't be deceitful. And don't have an inflated view of your own importance (swearing by your own head implies that you actually have power to make it happen). Satan, the father of all lies, whose nature is deception, would have us believe his lies and half-truths. Rather, let your words speak truth, and remember your humble position before God.

So here is a picture of what salt and light look like, a picture of who we are and how we live with each other. Do we sin and fall short of God's expectation for his children? Yes, indeed we do. Confronted with our sin and shortcomings, we repent and confess our sins of thought and attitude, word and deed, to God, asking forgiveness for Jesus's sake and for the strength of God's Spirit to turn away from these sins and live at peace with one another, loving and serving each other, as Christ Jesus continues to love and forgive us.

²¹ "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' ²² But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother^[a] will be liable to judgment; whoever insults^[b] his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell^[c] 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. ²⁵ Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. ²⁶ Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.^[d]

Lust

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 lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹ If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

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 everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Oaths

³³ "Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.' ³⁴ But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, ³⁵ or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. ³⁶ And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. ³⁷ Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil.