

6<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany      2/12/17  
Matthew 5:21-37                      A

COME TO TERMS QUICKLY WITH YOU 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. TRULY, I SAY TO YOU, YOU WILL NEVER GET OUT UNTIL YOU HAVE PAID THE LAST PENNY.

You just heard your pastor read these words from Matthew's Gospel, and the verses that surround them, and I concluded the reading of those words with these words, "This is the Gospel of the Lord". That is a statement – a definite statement. But, after hearing those words of Jesus, you have to wonder, wouldn't it be better as a question?

Listen to these words. Jesus says, "Come to terms quickly you're your accuser while you are going with him to court". Jesus is telling you that you have an accuser and He is taking you to court. You understand what is happening here, right? You've done something wrong. What have you done? Jesus doesn't say specifically, but He gives a lot of evidence against you.

If you look at how Jesus begins, it almost sounds like you killed somebody. "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment'". Did you bump somebody off?

Well, no, maybe you didn't end their earthly life. Maybe you just got angry with someone. And that anger led you to insult them, by calling them a "fool," or something even worse. Jesus says those things are also liable to judgment. You know how easy it is to get angry and start shooting your mouth off. Is that the reason your accuser is taking you to court, to stand

before the judge? Is that what you've done, or have you done something else?

When you look at the verses following telling you your accuser is taking you to court, Jesus says adultery and looking at someone with lust are liable to judgment and punishment, as well. Have you committed adultery? Maybe you've just enjoyed that lustful stare. Is that what you've done? Is that why you are on your way to stand before the judge?

Or, maybe it is because you took an oath, and you failed to follow through on your words. Like at your confirmation, when you said you would live according to the Word of God. Or, at your wedding, when you promised to love and honor your bride as Christ does His Church, or that you would obey your husband as the Church submits to Christ. But, now, your thoughts, and words, and deeds are evidence against you that you broke your promise. Is that why you're going to court?

Did you end someone's life? Are you angry with someone? Did you insult someone, calling them a "fool," or a name we dare not repeat, especially in Church? Did you commit adultery? Did you not keep your word? Is that why you are headed to court? Jesus says all these things are liable to judgement and the prison house of hell. This – THIS – is the Gospel of the Lord?

And who is this accuser, anyway? Satan? After all, "Satan" means "accuser". And, we all know how awfully good he is at accusing you of your sin. But, since he has been thrown out of heaven, he cannot possibly be your accuser before the throne of God in heaven. So, no, your accuser is not Satan.

So, who is it? Most simply, your accuser is the person you have wronged. The one you have been angry with, insulted, called that name –

your spouse, your co-worker, your child; maybe that person you have been looking at lustfully. Maybe it's the person you swore that oath to, promising never to do it again, only to do it again. They could all be the person taking you to court to stand before the judge.

But, if you think it is one of these people, you miss the point of Jesus' words. When you want to harm someone in their body, when you are angry with someone, insult someone, look lustfully at someone, break your word of promise to someone, who have you wronged? Who really and truly have you sinned against? The One you have really wronged is the One who said, "You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor". Jesus, very God of very God, is the One who told you these things. Jesus is your accuser. He is the One pointing out to you the wrong you have done. And, you know He is right. You know the evil you have done. Your sin is ever before you. So, Jesus is your accuser, taking you to court, to hand you over to the judge. And, you shouldn't be surprised at that, at all. After all, you believe the Bible and the Bible says, "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil" (2 Cor 5:10).

Jesus is your accuser, He is taking you to court, He is going to hand you over to the judge, and you are going to be looked up in the prison house of death and the grave. And we say, "This is the Gospel of the Lord". Shouldn't that really be a QUESTION, asking, "how in the world can this be the GOSPEL of the Lord". No. Absolutely not. It is not a question. This is Gospel. Good News. A definite statement. And here's why.

Jesus is your accuser, taking you to court, to appear before the Judge. But, here is the GOOD NEWS for you, Dear Child of God. Who is

the Judge? You confessed the answer to that question again this morning, “He will come again with glory to JUDGE both the living and the dead”. “He” – Jesus. When your accuser hands you over the Judge, your Judge will be Jesus, and His verdict upon you is this, “I forgive you all your sins”. Not guilty. Nor, should that surprise you, Dear Child. For you know the Bible, “As I live, declares the LORD GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked” (Ez 33:11).

Here’s why your Judge is able to pronounce that verdict upon you. Your Judge traded places with you. He took on flesh and bone. He took from you all your murder and anger, all the hurtful words you have spoken, all your adultery and lust, all oaths you have broken, all your lies, all the sins you have committed. He took all of that upon His own body. Carrying all that, the chief priests, the scribes, and Pharisees became His accusers, and they took Him to court to stand before the judge we know as Pontius Pilate. He was accused of blasphemy and declared an enemy of the state. He was handed over to the guards to be beaten, mocked, and crowned with thorns. And then, they crucified Him upon a cross. And after six hours on that cross, He died. And He was buried. But, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, God the Father raised Him to life again. The Easter resurrection of Christ Jesus means that God the Father accepted His Son’s sacrifice for the reconciliation of the world. The last penny of your sin has been paid.

Jesus lives. And He lives to deliver that forgiveness He won on the cross to you. And He does it in the water and Word of your Baptism. He comes to you with His life-giving body and blood with the bread and wine of Holy Communion. He does it with the Word of Absolution that He speaks into your ears: “I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”.

Your sins are forgiven, so that when the Day of Judgement comes, when Jesus comes in all His glory to judge the living and the dead, you can stand before the Judge without fear, for you have already been declared innocent. You have been declared not guilty, because of Jesus and He work for you.

And that also means something for you today. When someone really does sin against you and they come to you quickly to say, "Please forgive me". You have the heart and mind of Christ, as you sit in the judge's seat, and so you say what Jesus says, "I forgive you".

Jesus is your accuser and He takes you to court to stand before the judge. And, the Good News in that for you, Dear Child of God, is that Jesus is your judge and His verdict upon you is this, "I forgive you all your sins". This is the Gospel of the Lord, no doubt about it.