

6 S. after Epiphany 2/16/20
Matthew 5:21-37 A

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ 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. 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.”

Abel was a keeper of sheep, and his brother Cain was a worker of the soil. The day came when Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, while Abel brought of the firstborn of his flock and their fat portions. God was quite pleased with the offering of Abel, but He had no regard for that of Cain. And, that made Cain really angry. He was ticked. So angry in fact that when the day came when the two brothers went out in the field, Cain rose up and struck Abel down with his own hands. He murdered his own brother in cold blood.

Bathsheba and Uriah were married. One day when Uriah was out fighting the king’s battles, Bathsheba took a bath in view of the king and he sent for Uriah’s wife and they had an affair. It wasn’t long after that that Bathsheba sent the king a little note, that read I am pregnant. So, the king, being the king, calls Uriah home from the battle, thinking he would have relations with his wife and everyone would think and assume Bathsheba’s child was her husband’s. Great plan, except for one thing – Uriah is an honorable man and he won’t go in and lie with his wife, while his men are enduring the hardships of warfare. So, the king comes up with Plan B: send Uriah back to the battle to where the fighting is the fiercest. And Uriah is struck down and killed.

On July 2, 1881, Charles Guiteau walked into the Baltimore and Potomac railroad station in Washington, DC. He thought he deserved a

diplomatic post to Paris, France, and he was really ticked, angry, that he had been overlooked for the post. He knew President James Garfield was going to be there, so shot president Garfield in the back. 79 days later, on September 19, 1881, Garfield died of complications of infection.

Have you ever struck somebody down with you own hands, ended their life? No, of course not, because you are a Christian. But you have been angry, at your own brothers and sisters in Christ, that brother or sister in Christ who may even be your spouse, your child, your parent. They do something that ticks you off, and you get really angry. And when they do that; no, you have not raised your hand to strike them down; but you question their intelligence. And you take it upon yourself to give them a new name, a name like imbecile, idiot, knuckle-dragger, fool.

The reason I told you about Cain, David, Charles Guiteau, and even you is because of what Jesus says. He says this, "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgement'(v. 21)." So, when you look at Cain, David, Charles Guiteau and you, who's guilty? Who's liable to judgment? Who is the murderer?

Cain lifted his hand and struck his brother dead. Cain is guilty. Cain is liable to judgment. Well, what about King David? He didn't actually lift his hand to kill his neighbor Uriah; he just made some arrangements. So, is he guilty? Is he liable to judgment? And Charles Guiteau? You could well make the point that President Garfield didn't die of the gunshot wound, he died of complications of infection. So, is Guiteau guilty? Is he liable to judgment?

And you? You haven't raised your hand to strike anyone dead. All you have done is gotten angry, thrown out a few words, named a few names.

So, as you see things -- you really only have one guilty of murder and that's Cain. Everybody else is fine, because they haven't lifted their hand to strike anybody dead, right?

Well, if that's what you think, what you believe, you may want to listen to Jesus. He says this,

"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' 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 (v. 21-22)."

Just when you are feeling really good about yourself for being such a good person, along comes Jesus and ruins the whole thing by telling you and King David, and Charles Guiteau that you are as just as guilty of murder and just as liable to judgment as Cain.

Jesus comes along and says if you want to understand the 5th Commandment (*You shall not murder*) correctly, you have to understand that anger and insults and name calling are just as deadly weapons as are a sword or a knife. And they make you just as guilty of murder, just as liable to judgment as Cain.

It's true. Just listen to what the Bible says, "Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him (1 Jn 3:15)." Jesus is teaching us this morning that if you are going to get angry with someone, then you are guilty and liable to judgment. If you are going to insult someone when you are angry, you are

guilty and liable to judgment. If you want to call someone a “fool” or something far worse, then you are liable to the hell of fire.

Then, Jesus says this to you,

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 (v. 23-24).”

Jesus tells you that living a Christian life means getting rid of the anger, dropping the insults, stop the name calling, and instead sit down with your neighbor and work it out. Be reconciled.

And, this is not some pie in the sky dream. It can happen and it did happen, all because Jesus came in the flesh to be your brother. He came to tell you what God had to say, about God’s ways, His commands. But, you didn’t like that. You got ticked, just like your brothers at the synagogue that day at Capernaum. Jesus came and preached a sermon, and they got angry. They wanted to throw Jesus off a cliff, to murder Him, just get rid of Him.

It didn’t work that time. But, it did work when the Pharisees and chief priests came up with a plan to take Jesus out. He was always correctly them and they were ticked off at what Jesus had to say. So, they convinced one of His own to betray Him, took Him before the Sanhedrin, dragged Him before the Roman governor and got Jesus sentenced to death. As he hung upon the cross, they insulted Jesus, “You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross (Mt 27:40).” And the chief priests, and scribes and elders, mocked Him, “He saved others; he cannot save Himself. He is the king of Israel; let Him come own now from the cross,

and we will believe in Him. He trusts God; let God deliver Him now, if He desires Him (27:42-43).”

But, Jesus takes all the anger, all those insults, all the mocking. He absorbs it all upon His own mortal flesh. And he gives to you His blood shed upon that cross that forgives all your sins, all your anger, all your insults and name calling. And that means that you are not liable to judgment because Jesus takes away your judgment by dying upon the cross for you, in your place.

And you receive from Jesus love, forgiveness, and reconciliation between you and God. It flows over you in the waters of Baptism; into your ears in the words of Absolution; and as you eat and drink it in Holy Communion, so that you are filled with His love and peace, forgiveness and reconciliation. And that means that when you have a disagreement with you brother or sister in Christ -- even when that brother or sister is your spouse, your child, your parent -- you really can set aside your anger, put aside your insults, put aside your name calling, and forgive one another in Christ. That’s reconciliation. That’s what Jesus says to do.