

Pastor Jon's sermon from February 16

Text: Matthew 5:21-37

“Community Building 101 by Jesus!”

Today, you will get more of a teaching sermon, because our Gospel is from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in Matthew... one of his greatest teachings about his kingdom come.

Last week you heard in our Gospel from Matthew, Chapter 5, that you are the salt of the earth and the light of world. We are to go out and mix with the world using the gifts God gave us to make it better.

This week, Jesus teaches his disciples and those of us who are reading this scripture today what it means to live in the blessed community he is putting forth.

To summarize our lesson for today, **this community of Jesus' followers shouldn't hold grudges. It should practice reconciliation. It respects women. And it is a community where your word should matter.**

First of all... grudge holding. The commandments say, you shall not murder. If you do, you will be liable to judgement. You will face the consequences of your actions when you get caught.

But Jesus re-interprets this commandment... he strengthens it to include grudges. This is called an antitheses. Jesus says that if you even harbor anger toward someone, or hold a grudge, it is equivalent to that of murder. You will be liable to the same judgement as a murderer. And if that grudge turns into insulting someone's intelligence and/or calling them names, then the punishment will be even greater for you. Think about it... it takes a lot of time and energy to hold a grudge. Eventually it will overtake you. Jesus says the ultimate judgement will be that you are liable to the hell of fire. That doesn't sound like a good outcome just for holding a grudge. In other words, grudges will destroy you and your community or family.

But instead of letting your anger fester, Jesus wants us to be a community built on forgiveness. For example, Jesus says that if you remember someone has something against you, before you give your offering in worship, you should go first and be reconciled. Leave your gift at the altar and go find the person. That could mean leaving the place of worship and walking 7 miles in order to make things right. I think you could turn that around and ask who are you holding a grudge against? Go and reconcile. Let's not just talk about forgiveness in church, let's actually go do something about it. You may not be best friends, but you can let go of your anger and the hurts in order to move on.

Every community and every family has problems. Followers of Jesus will live differently, however. We will be people of reconciliation and forgiveness. Think of how much you are forgiven through Jesus' work on the cross? Knowing that, who are we to withhold forgiveness from another?

Then Jesus addresses the men in his community. In today's world you can apply this to all genders. Jesus reminds them of the commandment you shall not commit adultery. Keep in mind, God gave this commandment originally because God cares about marriages. God doesn't want families to be ripped apart by adultery and divorce.

But Jesus says, even if you look at another woman with lust in your eyes, with a leering gaze, that is equivalent to committing adultery. Jesus is warning against treating women as sexual objects. It dishonors your spouse and whoever's spouse they may be. Jesus' response is "if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. If your hand causes you to sin cut it off." Is Jesus serious? Then we should all have no eyes and no hands. I take Jesus here as hyperbole. He wants us to remove the temptations in your life that cause you to think and act this way. Have eyes only for your beloved.

And back in those days, only the man could write a certificate of divorce. It was a patriarchal society. Men could write a certificate of divorce for any reason at all. Jesus saw this as unfair. Here Jesus is standing up for the rights of women. Jesus is saying you can't just

trade your spouse in for a newer model. There has to be a huge reason, like unchastity, and today, abuse. However, bottom line is, Jesus desires all marriages to last. He says in Mark, what God has joined together, let no one separate. God hopes all marriages work out. But sometimes they don't. Even in divorce, you may have a piece of paper that says you are divorced, but you forever be connected to that person. You are never fully separated.

And finally, Jesus wants our word to mean something. If you say you are going to do something, then do it. My best friend Tom taught me this in high school. He would call me on a Saturday and say, you want to go to the movies tonight? I said sure. That is before I checked with my parents about family plans that night. Tom called me on this. He said, "If you can't go, it won't hurt my feelings. But don't say yes, and then tell me later you can't go." Let your yes be yes and your no be no. There is no need to make oaths or to swear on your mother's grave. Jesus' community should be based on truth.

So what do we do with these teachings of Jesus? The bottom line is, when we do follow Jesus commandments life should go better for us. And yet the sun still rises on good and evil. Following Jesus' commandments doesn't guarantee long life, but while you are living, they can bring hope and peace. Jesus wants the church to model these practices. The Bible teaches "Do not let the sun go down on your anger." Forgive others as we have been forgiven. Men treat women with the utmost respect and vice versa. And by all means, cherish your spouses. And if that is a foreign concept to you, make today day one of the rest of your lives together.

And finally, know that these teachings will build up our community and not tear it down. And when we fall short, know that in Christ there is an abundance of forgiveness. We are people of grace. We are not saved by the law and our ability to live up to it. In communion we are reminded of this. There we are fully forgiven and set free to love the neighbor as ourselves.

Amen!