

## Reconciliation

Deuteronomy 5:16-21; Matthew 5:21-26

West Valley Pres, March 5, 2023 (communion Sunday)

1. I want to start off this morning by showing you a video. It was made by a ministry called He Gets Us, and was shown at the Superbowl two weeks ago. You might have seen it, in fact.

SLIDE 1 AFTER CLICKING ON THE LINK, CLICK ON THE "LOVE YOUR ENEMIES" VIDEO

2. These are real photos. There is a LOT of rage out there. As we all probably know. It's worse now than I ever remember it being, even worse than 1968, if you remember that. Jesus has a lot to say to us about handling anger, based on the commandment about not murdering. Let's read out loud together the last 5 commandments, and then read out loud what Jesus has to say.

SLIDES 2-3 AS WE READ THESE OUT LOUD

3. Deuteronomy 5:17-21

<sup>17</sup> "You shall not murder.

<sup>18</sup> "You shall not commit adultery.

<sup>19</sup> "You shall not steal.

<sup>20</sup> "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

<sup>21</sup> "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife. You shall not set your desire on your neighbor's house or land, his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

SLIDES 4-7 AS WE READ THESE OUT LOUD

4. Matthew 5: 21-26

<sup>21</sup> "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder,<sup>[a]</sup> and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' <sup>22</sup> But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister<sup>[b][c]</sup> will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,'<sup>[d]</sup> is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.

<sup>23</sup> "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, <sup>24</sup> leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.

<sup>25</sup> "Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you

over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. <sup>26</sup> Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.”

5. I think the video makes it VERY clear why Jesus says that not only should we not murder anyone, we shouldn't insult anyone either. Words have consequences. Words can hurt. Words can enrage. And rage can tear the social fabric apart. Sometimes it's not clear whether the social fabric can be woven back together again.

A. For example, school board meetings in Tuolumne County used to be so uneventful and downright boring that the local newspaper seldom even reported them. Which one would expect, given that there are only 50K people in the whole county, and most of them are older and know one another. But during the pandemic, things changed. County residents who might not have even had children in the public schools would come and scream at the school boards, sometimes for hours at a time. That had consequences. School board members quit, because they were afraid that they would be shot or their houses burned down. They feared people whom they used to regard as friends. The schools already had a lot of challenges. They sure didn't need broken school boards on top of poverty, no computers, and pandemic shutdowns.

6. And if it's important for the sake of our fellow citizens to watch our language, how much more important is it to watch our language for the sake of our families and our brothers and sisters in Christ! In this passage, Jesus is speaking specifically about how we address our brothers and sisters, ie, our fellow church members.

SLIDE 8 – Mt 5:21

A. He starts out by saying, “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder’, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.” Since there was a commandment against murder, there are also instructions in the OT about what to do if it happens.

SLIDE 9 – MT 5:22

B. But then he goes deeper. The root of murder is hatred and contempt – a type of rage-filled anger that you keep inside you and don't let go of. To really deal with murder, we would have to deal with the anger we hang onto. And so Jesus says, “But I tell you” – which, btw, is a Messianic claim; Jesus is saying that he has the right to expand the commandment – “but I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister (whether biological or a fellow disciple) is subject to judgment.” If we are angry at another church member and don't deal with it, it grows into the rage that we saw in the video. And what effect do you think so much rage would have on the health of the family or of the church?

C. Next Jesus gives some specific examples of harm that comes out of anger: “Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, “Raca” is answerable to the court.” Raca was a slang word, probably meaning something like, “You blockhead!” or, “You idiot!” If someone were to say that

to you, they'd be saying that you've got no brains. How would you react if someone said, "You idiot!" to you? Words like that are fighting words. Like we saw in the video. Fighting words are answerable in a court because they cause trouble. How much more trouble do they cause in a home or a church!

D. Jesus' next example is of harm that comes forth not just from fighting-words anger, but from contempt-filled anger: "But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell." Really? Hell? For words? Well, think about it. I had a friend in grade school whose mother used to tell her, "You aren't worth the bullet to shoot you with." Sort of a fancier version of "You fool!" What effect do you think the mother's words had on her daughter? Those are the kinds of words that can destroy people, whom you have covenanted to love and protect. Jesus knows what he's talking about. Words spoken in contemptuous anger can indeed kill. That may not be murder in a legal sense. But it can be murder in a spiritual sense.

7. So. What do we do? We've all been angry; that's part of who we are as human beings who live in a sin-filled world. Fortunately for us, Jesus isn't telling us to stop being angry, period, because that's impossible. He's telling us what to do about our anger so that we don't carry rage around with us, and we don't harm other people with our rage.

SLIDE 10 MT 5: 23-24

8. What do we do? Jesus tells us, "Reconcile!" Reconcile with whoever has something against you. Right now. Top priority. That even takes priority over offering a gift in worship. "If you're offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. **FIRST** go and be reconciled, **THEN** come and offer your gift."

A. Jesus does NOT say, "Quit the church if someone is mad at you." And he does NOT say, "Praying for that person is good enough." He says, "Go. Right now. While you're thinking about it. Reconcile. And then come to church and offer your gift to God."

SLIDE 11 MT 5:25

9. And if it's a financial conflict that has gotten bad enough that lawyers are involved, then Jesus advises, Reconcile! Specifically, he says, "Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison." If you go to court, you might not win your case. You're better off to reconcile.

10. So if it's a personal relationship that has fallen apart – we are to reconcile. If it's a business matter and we're suing one another – again, we are to reconcile. Jesus is exceedingly clear about this. It's for our own good, and everyone else's good too. Flying into rages and seriously hurting or killing other people is of no benefit to anyone.

11. Can we reconcile? Yes. Remember the story of Esau and Jacob that's in the book of Genesis? They were twins, born into a world where the elder brother inherited a double portion of the estate and the father's blessing; and Esau was born first.

A. Jacob managed to steal both the double portion and the blessing from his twin brother, who was so upset and angry that he threatened to kill Jacob. So Jacob went to live for many years with his mother's family in Mesopotamia. He did very well there, with 2 wives, 2 mistresses, 12 sons and at least 1 daughter, and large healthy flocks and herds of animals. But eventually the relationship between him and his father in law got tense, and Jacob decided it was time to go home.

B. When he and his family and flocks and herds were drawing near to Israel, he started to worry. What if Esau still wanted to kill him? So he sent a message to Esau, telling him that he was returning home and hoped to find favor with him. Esau decided to come to meet Jacob, bringing 400 men with him. When Jacob heard that, he was really scared. He prayed hard, and he sent a substantial present to his brother – hundreds of animals – out ahead of him. When Esau drew near, Jacob bowed down 7 times to the ground, to indicate that he was subordinating himself to his brother and would obey him.

C. Now. What would YOU have done if you were Esau? If your sibling had stolen what was rightfully yours and then ran far away, and now was coming home after 20 years? But the Bible says that Esau "ran to meet Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept together."

D. Esau reconciled with Jacob, even though he didn't know what was going on Jacob's head, and even though Jacob hadn't yet apologized. And the two brothers lived the rest of their lives in peace with one another, nearby, but not TOO close.

E. If Esau could reconcile, even without an apology or a settling of accounts, then we can too. It can be done. We have the power and the example of Jesus to strengthen us. Esau didn't have those things. If he could do it, we can.

12. But what if we don't want to reconcile? What if the other person really did say some terrible things? Well, here is where we have to depend on God's grace to help us.

A. Remember that Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven?" Blessed are those who know their need of God? OK. If we don't want to reconcile, then we need God to help us, and we know it. So the first thing we do is pray for help to even want to reconcile. That's what I do, regularly; and I find that that's the sort of prayer God answers right away.

B. For instance, some years ago a church member several times came into my office to tell me that I had no business being a pastor, that Scripture forbids it, and therefore I am not abiding by Scripture and should resign. Did I want to reconcile with that member? No, I didn't. I was mad and hurt, and I wanted her to say she was sorry. But I know what Jesus commands; so I

started by praying, "God, grant me the grace to WANT to forgive. You know that right now I don't want to forgive her; so, grant me the grace to want to. Grant me the grace to want to be reconciled." And guess what, I have found that, by praying that prayer over time, I can indeed find myself wanting to forgive. And then reconciliation can begin.

13. So now, here we are, in church. Shortly I will begin the communion prayer and we will celebrate the Lord's Supper together, which is the holiest thing we do together as Christians. It's not the same thing as bringing gifts to the altar. It's more like we are coming to the altar to receive the gifts that we need – the gifts that only Jesus can give us.

A. But Jesus said, "If you there remember that your brother or sister has something against you", your first priority is to go and be reconciled.

B. So we are going to take at least a full minute, right now, to sit in silent prayer before God, and ask him, "Is there anyone with whom you want me to reconcile?" We will try to be open to whatever God wants to say to us about that; we will try to let the Holy Spirit speak to our spirits.

C. Then after that, we will celebrate communion through prayer and the reception of the bread and cup, so that we will have the strength and the courage to try to reconcile with whoever God has placed on our hearts. And we will all go into the world in the hope that we can become the reconcilers that Jesus calls us to be.

D. Let's pray.