

Good Enough. A Work in Progress. Above and Beyond!

Matthew 5:21-37

February 16, 2020 † Rev. Kevin Hilgendorf

Let us pray: Almighty and Eternal God, so draw our hearts to you, so guide our minds, so fill our imaginations, so control our wills, that we may be wholly yours, utterly dedicated to you; and then use us, we pray, as you will, but always to your glory and the welfare of your people, through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

I was working with my dad an electrician and said "good enough" after finally putting in a receptacle. Immediately Dad said, " don't say that! It sounds like your work is not the best just did enough to get it done. We want our customers to be pleased with our work so we will be asked to come back."

The child was asked to clean his room before he could go out to play. He replied, "What's the least I have to do? He wondered if making the bed would count? Or if the floor had to be cleaned too. Do his clean clothes need to be put away? What about under the bed? The exasperated father wondered when the child would want a clean room for his own sake and not simply because the father asked. Such an attitude on the part of the child is similar to what's on display in today's Gospel.

To those people who want to be right with God, but wonder what is the minimum required to achieve that relationship, Jesus has an answer. Jesus takes certain aspects of the law of Moses and expands them. Rather than a command not to kill, Jesus says, do not grow angry. Rather than a command not to commit adultery, Jesus says not to look at another with lust. In other words the mosaic law is not simply the bare minimum we need to do to be right with God. We need to go above and beyond the letter of the law if we are to be followers of Christ merely fulfilling the minimum is not enough.

When Jesus responds in this way we may crave a return to the minimum. How can I keep myself from growing angry which is a natural human response to perceived injustice? The standard Jesus sets may seem impossible to realize. Jesus fulfills the law rather than abolishing it.. Jesus teaching goes to the heart of the matter.

Henry Ward Beecher's story in his Yale Lectures on preaching goes to the heart of the matter.

I had a man in my parish in Indiana, who was a very ugly fellow. He had a wife and daughter who were awakened during the revival which was then working and while visiting others who needed instruction I went to see and talk with them. He heard that I had been in his house, and shortly afterwards I was passed down the street in which he lived. He was sitting on the fence; and of all the filth that was ever emptied on a young minister's head. I received my share...he told me I should never darken his door again. To which I responded that I never would until I had his invitation to do so. Things went on for some time. I met him on the street bowed to him, spoke well of him and never repeated his treatment of me to anyone... Very soon he ran for office of sheriff and then I went into the field and worked for him. I canvassed for voters; I used my personal influence... He was elected. When he knew I was working for him, he was perplexed. Did not know what to make of it. He came to me one day awkward and stumbling and undertook to "make up" as the saying is. He said he would be very glad to have me call and see him. I congratulated him on his election and of course accepted his overtures and from that time forth I never had a faster friend than he was. Now I might have thrown stones at him from the top most cliffs of Mt. Sinai and hit him every time, but that would not have done him any good. Kindness killed him. I won his confidence.

In the Small Catechism of Martin Luther, the eighth commandment says "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. ". What does this mean? We are to fear and love God so that we do not tell lies about our neighbors, betray or slander them, or destroy their reputations. Instead we are to come to their defense, speak well of them and interpret everything they do in the best possible light.

St. Paul writes in Romans 13. Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for one who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. The commandments you shall not commit adultery, you shall not kill, you shall not steal, and any other commandment are summed up in this sentence. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no wrong to a neighbor therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

Now the peace which passes all understanding keep your hearts and mind in Christ.