

Sermon Notes: February 12, 2023

[Lectionary Readings](#)

Focus: The Antitheses (murder, adultery, divorce, oaths, retaliation, and love)

Do you do the "right" thing all the time? Probably not. It would be easy to imagine Jesus as a religious Santa. Jesus is making a list and checking it twice. He's gonna find out who's naughty or nice. Did you look lustfully today? Coal in your stocking! Did you stay married? Sugar and spice and everything nice for you.

I have to believe what Jesus is always asking for is a deeper, *less* legalistic experience of God. That is not obvious because Jesus uses the Law (Torah and Ten Commandments) to tell us that the Law is not sufficiently demanding. It is easy to hear this gospel and find it out of touch and maybe even oppressive.

Today is the "six Antitheses." The formula is: You have heard X said....But I say Y to you. Jesus recites a law, starting with two of the Ten Commandments, and then makes a series of comments. I have come to believe that the six antitheses are primarily about a call to holiness. This has nothing to do with making it onto Santa Jesus's nice list. God wants us to function at our best and not settle for a lukewarm connection to holiness. Jesus is not lambasting us for our failings, but empowering us to achieve a stronger connection with God.

1st Antithesis - You know about murder, but I tell you anger is murder.

Maybe today this would be, "Don't call people idiots when you are driving on 680." Anger and contempt are cancerous, maybe if not quite murder, but still terrible. Do I think I am in the exact same state as an actual murderer when I get angry at someone? Of course not! He used vivid language to make a vivid point.

What is true is that the more we nurse anger and resentment, the less able we are to connect with the goodness of God's world. Let go of the garbage *you create* and let go of the stereotypes *you place* on other people. You get what you create and expect. If you think everyone is an idiot, the world will look idiotic. Treating people like fools will blind you to your own inherent goodness and holiness.

2nd Antithesis - You know about adultery, but I tell you lust is adultery.

Jesus makes adultery and lust equal to shake us awake. But if you see someone you think is beautiful that's fine; but do not make them dance for you or try to possess them. Do not force them to stoke your ego. Do not try to get them to flatter you. Those are all a kind of lust. For example, a rector (not me) made one of their female associates twirl in front of the congregation on her first Sunday. It was humiliating to watch, but she felt compelled to do it. He had power and lusted to bend her to his capricious will. Treating her like a puppet - lust. Lust blinds us to the universal equality that we have in relation to each other.

3rd Antithesis - You know about divorce, but I tell you stop treating your partner as a starter home and marrying up. This is a “clobber passage.” If you are divorced, you might wince hearing this scripture today. I think this one is more directed to the powerful of Jesus’ day. Men and women are equal players when it comes to being sinful. But in the Ancient Near East, women were treated barely better than cattle. So, for a powerful man to divorce a woman because she bored him was a formula for her financial ruin. His upgrade to a different woman was her ruin. Jesus wants men and women to have an equal footing and equal outcomes.

4th Antithesis - You know how to make vows to God, but I tell you, just say yes or no when you make promises. This is the most practical of the antitheses. Stop flowering your speech just to look authentic. Whenever someone says, “trust me”, I get worried. Just let your actions speak louder than words.

Practically, there is incredible power in being succinct. Act 2 of Hamlet: “Since brevity is the soul of wit and tediousness the limbs and outward flourishes, I will be brief...” Shakespeare was being a bit ironic since the speaker Polonius would ultimately lose his life from his meddling. Nevertheless, brevity is enormously powerful. If you chatter about making promises, you are going to disappoint yourself and others. Be brief, connect to God, and you will be closer to a picture of trustworthiness and grace.

5th Antithesis - You know about retaliation (eye for eye), but I tell you turn the other cheek. Be willing to be insulted before going scorched earth on someone. It’s easy to love lovely people, but to love those who are easy to hate – whew! This seems obvious to me and hard to practice.

6th Antithesis - You know you are supposed to love your neighbor, but I tell you love your enemy. This one too seems obvious. We know we are supposed to love our enemy even when we don’t. I do not sense that this one needs any more of my bloviating either.

The six antitheses within the context the whole sermon on the mount Jesus’ words are harsh and impossible to fulfill. We cannot get on God’s nice list. But God opens us to love, if we let God. Jesus says to St. Timothy’s today, “Wake up and long for more.” Wake up to our lives, ourselves, our families, and community.

Question during Black History Month Historically and currently marginalized people may hear Jesus’ sermon differently. If you already have lots of power, bridling that privilege can be a very fruitful discipline. If you don’t have unearned power, how do you hear and apply these antitheses? **Todd**