

3/8 – “Go and Be Reconciled”

Last week we focused on the greatest commandment, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength,” Jesus expounded in the Sermon on the Mount from the 1st 4 Commandments.

This week we focus on the 2nd greatest commandment: “Love Your Neighbor as Yourself,” as Jesus expounded in the Sermon on the Mount from the last 6 commandments. Spoiler alert. Despite how it sounds, this is not exactly a warm and fuzzy message. Jesus, especially in the Gospel of Matthew, demands of us moral and ethical action. After all, true love is not a feeling, but an action. True love is demanding.

First let us turn to **Exodus 20:12-17 in O.T. on p. 106.**

To hear Jesus expounding upon these commandments in the sermon on the mount, now consider **Matthew 5:21-26 in the N.T. on p. 1378.** Jesus’ exposition of the commandments further continues thru ch. 6.

One thing to note is that Jesus’ words in the sermon on the mount do not reduce the commandments, but demands even more of us in obedience to them, demanding even more of us to remain faithful to him. The commandments and the sermon on the mount actually call attention to our sin and our failure to love each other.

Remember last year when we heard messages from 1John? We repeatedly heard of the need to love each other, especially in forgiving those with whom we are angry. Today’s passage has a similar focus. Take note of Mt 5:23-24, urging us to settle matters quickly on the way to court and to **be reconciled**. But we are not in court on a daily basis, thankfully. So, what is God’s particular message for us in daily living?

Listen how court room language again is heard later in Matthew, as in the sermon on the mount, but now pertaining to general church matters. Turn now to **Mt 18:15-20 p. 1401.** Pay attention to v. 16 “...take 1 or 2 others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of 2 or 3 witnesses.’” This verse corresponds to the 9th commandment, “**you shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.**” In applying not just to the court room, but to the church as well, this is the focal point of God’s message for us today.

In preparing to preach, the same commandment, “you shall not give false testimony” kept showing up in daily devotions leading up to this sermon. I’ve heard that 2 FPCP ruling elders are also meditating upon the proverbs in their daily devotions, so this word may sound familiar to them. **Proverbs 6:16-19 on p. 910,** reads: “There are 6 things the Lord hates, 7 that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil – (and specifically) v. 19 – **a false witness who pours out lies and a person who stirs up conflict in the community.** Also p. 919, 12:17: **An honest witness tells the truth, but a false witness tells lies;** p. 921, 14:5: **An honest witness does not deceive, but a false witness pours out lies;** p. 922, 14:25: **A truthful witness saves lives, but a false witness is deceitful.**

Now how do such verses apply to us within our congregation? For one thing, conflict does from time to time happen within any church community, because the church is comprised of imperfect people, who can and will sometimes offend one another, misunderstand one another, and hurt one another, even without trying. Thus, the need for forgiveness and Jesus' plea for us to be reconciled. As a fellow human being, there have been time that I have needed to apologize to some of you for example. And there maybe times where you ask me to forgive you.

One area of conflict, offense, misunderstanding, and hurt is when we break the 9th commandment of false testimony.

Here is an example. If there is some kind of conflict in the church, sometimes people disappear from among the congregation, no longer attending, no longer being present. When this occurs, whether as a new development, in recent history, or even in the distant past, people often talk. People share reasons why "we think" people leave. And after reasons are repeated and heard enough, they may become within in our own reasoning truth, even if we are mistaken. We are very grateful that this is a loving congregation full of caring people, but this has sometimes happened among us. We try to diagnose the thought processes of people without speaking to each other directly, as Jesus specifies in Matthew 18. We may repeat what we have heard, sometimes circulating gossip and rumor, a sin called out in Scripture. For the sake of our spiritual well-being and that of the congregation as a whole, we need to be careful.

Here's another issue. Even if we have only shared our thought with only one person, if we find out that our assessment is wrong or a misperception, we often we do correct what we have passed on. That means that we bear false witness, which moves beyond gossip and rumor into slander. For one thing, we often do not go back and correct what we have said. We often do not apologize. We often do not attempt to reconcile.

Yet, saying we are sorry and asking for forgiveness is a part of our being Christians. Confessing to each other is encouraged in the Bible.

Here now is the prayer emphasis for Lent. Here now is the portion of the Lord's prayer that we had not yet spoken about last week. Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. Or forgive us trespasses. Or forgive us our sins. For when we sin, confession is expected of us by Jesus.

Reconciling with one another when we sin only makes us stronger in our relationship with God and with each other. After all, for the sake of reconciliation, Christ came to earth, sent by our Father.

I pray that we as Christ's followers will heed his word. Jesus never sinned, and, therefore, never needed to apologize. But we're not perfect. We're imperfect servants. As servants, we are to obey his commands, which are meant for the good of all. Reconciliation is a gift to all of us.

As such, may we stand to reaffirm our faith in unison from the 2nd Helvetic confession. Please stand and say with me...