

## **Sermon for February 15, 2014**

One thing we can say for certain is that Jesus is concerned about our relationships; our relationship with God and with each other. In fact that's why God gave us the Ten Commandments. They aren't some rule book to follow to help us get into heaven, but are instructions on how to be in a good relationship with God and each other. Our human nature, however, leads us to ask, "What rules do I have to follow?" When all we do is follow the rules and not think about what our actions are doing to others; it's like the spiritual milk that Paul writes about in his letter to the Corinthians.

We don't want to think. We want it spelled out for us in black and white—this is what we do and this is what we don't do. This was also true in Jesus' time. Did you know that there are six hundred and thirteen specific laws written in the first five books of the Bible? At first glance it may seem like Jesus is adding more rules to the list and making it harder to follow. But here Jesus is calling us to transcend our legalism and to go inside of ourselves. The laws that God gave us were to be written on our hearts—not memorized by our minds. This was the way we are supposed to act without thinking about it. This is how the kingdom of God is supposed to be!

So here in his first sermon in Matthew; Jesus is calling us to treat each other better, to deepen our relationships, to treat each other as people who are truly blessed and loved by God. Jesus tells us that it's not enough to not kill someone. We are to treat each other with respect and not fly off the handle in anger and call each other hateful names because that is demeaning and diminishing of

God's children. Do you ever wonder why when someone speaks nicely to us in person and badly about us to others we call it "backstabbing?" What would it look like here today if before we collected our offering we were to reconcile with anyone who has something against us? This kingdom of God may be personal, but it isn't private. What hurts one person hurts the whole group.

It's not enough to not physically commit adultery, but to honor and respect others without lusting after them. It goes even further than that. How many of us have created primary relationships with people from work, sports and the internet than with our spouses? Things that we should be discussing with the person we promised to love and cherish are now things we discuss with our work spouses.

In Jesus' time the most vulnerable were the women and children. A divorce could be given for anything from burning bread to committing adultery. It's not enough to follow the letter of the law here, but we shouldn't treat people as disposable, getting rid of them on a whim. And if the marriage is beyond repair—are we making sure that those who are vulnerable will be taken care of.

It's not enough to not swear falsely or not to lie to others, but acting truthfully should be our nature at all times so we don't need make oaths. Truthfulness should be at the very core of our being and something we do without even thinking about it. This is what it means to have God's commandments written on our hearts; they become our very essence. God doesn't give us rules just to give us rules. They're given to care for and protect us and to help us to get more out this life than we would otherwise. Did you notice last week that Jesus said that those who break the rules would be the least in the kingdom? Did you get that?

Whether we keep the rules or break them we are still in the kingdom! So maybe we shouldn't think of these rules as a way for us to earn God's favor or a place in the kingdom, but as the precious gift that they are from a loving parent to help us treat each other well.

So if God really does care about our relationships; then we need to be tending to them. So I want us to think about our relationships. First I want us to think about a relationship that is healthy and sustains us. What makes it a good relationship? Why is it important? Then give thanks to God for the person in that relationship with you.

Next I want us to think about a relationship that is important to us but isn't healthy. Don't try to figure out who's to blame for the hurt, but instead I want us to find a way to hold that person up in prayer and to ask God for help in healing the broken relationship. Think about what we can do to heal that relationship. Let us pray: Gracious God, you created us to be in relationship with you and with all of creation. You first gave us your laws to help us with those relationships and then sent us your Son to show us how we can live in relationship with others in your kingdom. Being in relationship with you and others isn't always easy and we need your help to keep those relationships healthy and life giving. Send us your Holy Spirit to write your commandments on our hearts and not only our minds. We ask all of this in Jesus' name. Amen.