

Be My Valentine!

February 16, 2020

Pastor Tom Ford

Hill Avenue Grace Lutheran Church

Pasadena, California



Matthew 5:

[21] "You have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.'

[22] But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be liable to the hell of fire.

[23] So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you,

[24] leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

[25] Make friends quickly with your accuser, while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison;

[26] truly, I say to you, you will never get out till you have paid the last penny.

[27] "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'

[28] But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

[29] If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell.

[30] And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

[31] "It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.'

[32] But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, makes her an adulteress; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

[33] "Again you have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.'

[34] But I say to you, do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God,

[35] or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.

[36] And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black.

[37] Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil.



Interim Pastor Tom Ford



Hill Ave Grace
Lutheran Church



Centennial Celebration 1919-2019

Once upon a time there was an old fire-and brimstone preacher who used a particular gimmick to try to keep folks alert and attentive. During sermon time, one particular unalert man always fell asleep on the back pew. The preacher had enough of the man's rudeness and decided he would teach him a lesson. So, he began his sermon as he always did, slow-paced and low-toned. And like he always did, the rude man soon fell into a deep asleep. Then, the preacher said to the congregation, "Everyone who wants to go to Heaven, stand up." Everyone stood up, except for the man who snoring on the back pew. The preacher then motioned for everyone to sit down. Then he said quietly, "Now, everyone who wants to go to Hell..." and then, with a slamming bang of his hand on the pulpit and a shout in his voice, proclaimed, "STAND UP!" The sleeping man on the back pew was startled, woke up, and leaped to his feet as everyone around stifled their laughter. Then the man looked at everyone seated around him, then looked at the preacher and said, "Preacher, I don't rightly know what we're votin' on. But it looks like you and me are the only ones for it."ⁱ

Now pay attention, will you! Jesus has something important to say to each of us this morning. Would you like to know what it is? Are you ready?

"Be my valentine!"

Yes, today is St. Valentine's Sunday!

Remember when we were kids and everyone took valentines to school to give to each of our classmates. And so often it would read, "Be my valentine." Well, I believe that is what Jesus is saying to each of us this morning in the part of the Sermon on the Mount that is today's Gospel. And with the help of The Rev. Richard Fairchild, I want to hold that up for us on this Sunday two days after St. Valentine's Day.

"One day Abraham invited a beggar to his tent for a meal. When grace was being said, the man began to curse God, declaring that he could not bear to hear his name. Seized with indignation, Abraham drove the blasphemer away.

When he was at his prayers that night, God said to him, 'This man has cursed and reviled me for fifty years, and yet I have given him food to eat every day. Could you not put up with him for a single meal?'

On St. Valentine's Sunday I want to tell you simply this – Jesus says, 'Be my valentine!' We do it by loving each other. Love each other - not with the love that depends on chemistry, mood, and feelings - nor even with the love that depends on the behavior of others, but love each other with the kind of love that Christ holds up in today's Gospel, continuing the Sermon on the Mount.

You know the kind of love Jesus means - it is the love that goes beyond what seems right according to the letter of the law, and enters into the Spirit of what God wants for us, the love that enters into feeding others, into healing others, into showing grace to others, into giving peace to others, the love that values others, regardless of who they are or what they have or have not done.

Interim Pastor Tom Ford



Hill Ave Grace
Lutheran Church



Someone once caught WC Fields reading the Bible. 'What are you doing?' asked the person. 'Looking for loopholes', growled Fields.

When you are Jesus' valentine, there is no loophole, no escape hatch, no clauses that say the deal can be revoked if this or that condition is not met.

Love is total - it is unconditional - or it is not love at all.

Think of the words of Jesus we heard read a few minutes ago. They were words addressed to a people used to compromising – to altering love's demands as they are found in the law of God so that those demands would be easier to fulfill.

'You have heard it was said you shall not murder - but I say to you that if you are angry with your brother or sister - you will be liable to judgment.'

'You have heard that it was said, you shall not commit adultery, but I tell you that everyone who looks with lust at another has already committed adultery...'

'You have heard that it was said, you shall love your neighbors, but I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...'

There are no loopholes to be found in Jesus' words. No compromises, no deals, no escape hatches. What Jesus does is crystallize the issues involved in loving God and our neighbors so that we can know - without doubt – just where we stand, and exactly what we need to aim for.

Think about where you stand for a minute - think about how you love others and ask yourself - is my love up to the standards set by Christ?

- If you haven't killed someone - who have you called a fool? What emotion did you pour out upon him or her when you became angry with them?
- If you haven't committed adultery - and feel good about this - consider what you have wanted to do.
- Or consider who holds a grudge against you because of something you did - something for which you have not apologized?
- Or again - what promises and vows have you broken and then justified yourself in doing so?
- When was the last time you criticized immigrants for stealing all the jobs in this country, or expressed your dislike for the person who took the promotion that belonged to you?

Perhaps these are poor examples - but most of us, don't you know, love only our friends and our family - and we are not sure about our family at times!

We greet those who greet us,
We do good to those who do good to us,
We lend to those who will pay back,

Interim Pastor Tom Ford



Hill Ave Grace
Lutheran Church



We welcome those who welcome us.

As for everyone else - well - if asked, most of us have a reason for what we do, and an excuse for what we do not do.

What we aim for as Christians - is to break through the limitations of our excuses, we aim to destroy all reasons that we might offer to treat one person as less than another and to enter into relationships with each other that are based upon our equality before God.

An old pilgrim was making his way to the Himalayan Mountains in the bitter cold of winter when it began to rain. An inn keeper said to him, 'How will you ever get there in this kind of weather my good man?' The old man answered cheerfully – 'My heart got there first, so it's easy for the rest of me to follow.'

The gospel of Jesus Christ teaches that we can meet all the demands of love that are expressed in the law in one way – and only in one way - we can do so if we allow our hearts to go there first.

Today – St. Valentine's Sunday - I urge you - let your hearts go there - love God and love each other as deeply as you can. Be Jesus' valentine!

When you do - you will find, no matter how many mistakes you may make on the way, that goodness and blessedness will blossom along your path, and all that God has planned will come to pass."ⁱⁱ

Amen.

ⁱ Story from The Rev. Robert Lee Hill, Community Christian Church, Kansas City, MO

ⁱⁱ Verbatim from a sermon: Of Law and Of Love – Rev. Richard J. Fairchild

<http://www.rockies.net/~spirit/sermons/a-or06-99.php>

Interim Pastor Tom Ford



Hill Ave Grace
Lutheran Church



Centennial Celebration 1919-2019