

Deuteronomy 5: 17, 19, 29-33 Sermon 12.6.2022 – Honour God in your treatment of others

You shall not murder. So we come to the sixth commandment. You probably feel like you can relax a little here. You've probably never murdered anyone, as in used a gun or a knife to end someone's life. So you've kept this commandment. Well, not so fast.

I think we'd all agree it's a pretty good idea, not to murder. But every time we pick up the paper, watch the news we saw murder – and we ask why? How do we make sense of it?

We want to think about God's story. How does God's story help us to obey in the fullest possible way.

We have to do 3 things: 1. Love what God loves 2. See what God sees 3. Trust what God has done

1. Love what God loves - he is passionate about life.

To get the full force of the command do not murder, we have to remember the fact that God enjoys life. He's the one who sustains life. He has great joy in maintaining life, sustaining life. We enjoy buying a few goldfish to put in our tank at home; God enjoys creating thousand upon thousands of fish that live in miles and miles of ocean.

God made this amazing world. At the end of creation god creates man, the pinnacle of creation, in the image of God. The reason God hates murder of a human, the reason he takes so seriously the killing of humans is because we reflect in some way the transcendent glory of God. Therefore, he says there is no way to put a price tag on human life. In some way us humans reflect God's infinite glory. Killing an ant, or a dandelion – it's destroying life but nothing like putting a knife into a human. But why is it different?

Who determines which form of life is more important? Is it just the survival of the fittest? Who is to say that an ant is not as valuable as a human.? You see it's why

certain people might get together and decide there are certain women whose lives are less of a commodity (that is, just something to be bought and sold) so we can turn their lives into a sex trafficking trade or that children have less value in society so why don't we let them work 14 hours in a factory and not pay them. Or for the Israelites standing there right then. They've endured years of slavery, they were merely seen as a commodity so Pharaoh can meet his brickmaking quota. If there is ultimate sense in which human life is of infinite value then who's to say that Pharaoh had the wrong idea. Ultimately sex-trafficking, child labour and slavery is dehumanising and diminishes the value of human life.

But the biblical view, God's view, is that you have infinite value in God's eyes – that's part of what it means to love what God loves. So part of understanding this command is that we, like God, would see these people around me as made in the image of God and asking the question, how can I make these people's life flourish, which is what God does.

Look with me at the **Gen 9** passage – v.5 – *from each human being I will demand an accounting for the life of another human being. Whoever sheds human blood by humans shall their blood be shed.* If you kill someone you will be killed in payment for the life you took. Why? Because you have destroyed the life of someone made in the image of God. But notice here in v.7 – *As for you, be fruitful and increase in number; multiply on the earth and increase upon it.* It's not just negative don't kill, but go and cause people to flourish. - go out and draw out the glory and beauty of the people I've given you responsibility for.

CS Lewis in his collection of talks called *The Weight of Glory* says that we humans are special because we're made in God's image. He says "*there are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations - these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub and exploit – the person sitting next to you is going to live forever.*"

We are called to bring out the image of God in one another. To love what God loves. This is what it means to love what God loves

2. See what God sees – Is there something about us deep down that causes us to do these terrible deeds?

Let's look at Jesus' words in Matt 5:21 – Jesus says there are all sorts of things that we do that are the equivalent of taking out a knife. The seeds of murder are in our heart, any heart that has at any time harboured envy, gossip, slander, contempt, smugness, hatred. If at any time in your life those things have popped up in your heart towards another human being made in the image of God, Jesus is saying that's like murder.

We saw this past week in Ropes Crossing didn't we? Someone got angry pulled out a knife and murdered the 16year old who had made some comments he didn't like. This was anger run amok. But it can happen when we are envious. (Ohio murders) Murder is just the seed of envy run amok – seeing someone as your rival and allowing the seeds of envy and jealousy and inferiority to just flower to the fullest and allowing it to explode in something like murder. In other words he's saying it's not that you've murdered someone or you haven't murdered someone else that you're better, it's just a matter of degree, of how far along you've let those seeds grow. In other words, Jesus is saying, when you call someone a fool, when you're angry at them, and think of them with contempt, he's saying there is more than one way to murder someone, to destroy them. To call someone a moron, and Raca means to feel smug or superior to somebody else, to see them as an empty headed fool, not that any of us would feel smug or superior to anyone else, right? Jesus is saying when we do that, when I do that, and I do it all the time, it dehumanises people. It diminishes the value of their life in your eyes and in the eyes of other people. And what you're really saying, though you would never say it out loud because you're all too polite is , “for all I care that person can curl up in a corner and die”. That's what it means to treat people with contempt. When we look down on one another in contempt, when we engage in gossip, it dehumanises them, destroying their reputation, their humanity, treating them as if they weren't even there. That's what we have to see – see as Jesus sees. And he sees to our heart, he sees to our motives. Think about how many conversations revolve around gossip, tearing other down, people you work with, people you read about or saw on the news; the enjoyment you get when some celebrity is in jail. Jesus says when you're laughing at that, you're feeling superior, it smells like murder. You're going against the very core of the commandment, Love your neighbour as yourself. Remember the whole purpose is to weave beauty into the fabric of our community, this is what God does, and slander and gossip go right against that. It destroys life as God wanted it.

I think about myself. I'm a good Christian evangelical. I know the truth in the bible. How many times I think, why don't you other people believe the truth, it's so clear. It's so easy for me to look down on others who don't believe what I believe. Or they don't live as I think they should live. And I feel a sense of superiority.

I've lost my sense of humility; our lives are no different, we're saved by grace. I have to, we have to see what God sees if we're ever to come to grips with what's in our own hearts and in our own society.

3. Trust what God has done – Genesis 4 - Cain and Abel – Cain sees Abel as his rival. He sees Abel getting the goods from God when he doesn't get it and he rises up and he kills his brother. And it's fascinating because God comes along and says in v.9, "Where is your brother?" This is the very heart of the law, because Cain says, "Am I my brother's keeper." And God says, "That's the whole point. You ARE your brother's keeper, we ARE one another's keeper. We're not just supposed to know where they are but actually meet the needs of people around us. And so Cain does exactly the opposite. Instead of knowing and caring where Abel is, he kills him. So God says to him, "Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground." What does this mean? What is God saying here? Now think about that in terms of loving what God loves, of God as a creative force who loves life, that the blood that has sustained Abel, that the blood of one created in the very image of God had fallen on the ground. God had created that earth as a special gift, he'd created that world in such a way that when that blood hit the ground it defiled it, because it was speaking of death as opposed to life. And that's why Cain was banished; that's why he was punished, because there has to be some punishment because it was undoing the very thing that God was trying to do. By pouring the blood of a life of someone made in the image of God on to the ground Cain's action had despoiled and defiled God's good creation. And yet what's interesting is that despite the fact that as we saw in Genesis 9 that God's own law is blood for blood. Not only does God not kill Cain in judgement but when you go back and read it, Cain's saying in v.13, "God when you send me out you've alienated me away from my own people, I'm not going to last 10mins out there. Because they're going to know what I've done and I'm going to be killed.

But instead of saying "Blood for blood, too bad", God says, "I'll put a sign on you and protect you. No one can kill you. Now what kind of justice is that. What about the

blood that is crying out? What kind of a God would just let a murderer off? You see we will never understand that unless we understand and trust what God did centuries later when he sent Jesus Christ and understand the blood of Jesus. On the cross, Jesus having been beaten, having a spear thrust into him and nailed to the cross – the royal blood of Jesus dripping on to the earth. God's blood is spilling into the ground. But instead of defiling it, it is the first sign that God will keep his promise, and that he loves life so much that he would allow the very blood of God to spill into the ground; but instead of defiling the earth it will begin to renew it, and to restore it and to cleanse it from the blood that we have spilled of one another. See that is what we're supposed to trust. Trust what God has done by sending his only Son in our place – what he communicated to us is that we are of such infinite value to him that there is no cost too great to restore and forgive our life; even the blood of his own Son he will allow to have spilled so that we could live.

Hebrews 9 says, ²² *In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.* Blood for blood, God's law demands that someone pay, not just for the blood of those murdered out there, but for my envy, my gossip, my slander, my contempt for people. Blood for blood. Someone has to pay for that to restore God's good creation to what it's supposed to be, so we could all love what God loves. And it was the blood of Jesus that cleansed and caused forgiveness for us. If you trust that, what God did. If you put your faith in that, if you rest in that it will begin to cure you, and me and us of the seeds of murder. See think about it. Why are we envious and jealous and secretly rejoice when someone else fails, when they didn't get the promotion, when we see someone who isn't as attractive as us – why does it make us feel good? Why do we tend to exploit other people's weaknesses through slander and gossip; why do we look down on others, those of different social status or only hang out with certain people and not others. Why do we do that?

As I think about that I realise that my heart is desperately wicked, but our hearts are also desperately needy. Desperately needy, for affirmation that my life is worth something, that I have value, that I have purpose, that I feel good about myself, that I can look in the mirror and see that I have value. But the way we do that, we're like parasites, we try to give meaning to our own life by parasitically sucking the life out of others, instead of loving our neighbour, instead of looking to see how we can make their lives flourish. So that's why if we can trust what God has done on the cross by sending Jesus, that he loved the world so much that he sent his own son to

die. If that's what we trust in, then we don't need to suck the life out of others to make ourselves feel good. And not only that. When you understand that it was your envy and mine, your gossip and mine that caused Jesus to come; that he had to die for that, it will give us the appropriate humility for those who hold me in contempt, to actually be able to love my enemy.

Can you trust God to change you? God sees us as we are, but he loves us. He says I've taken those seeds of murder in your heart, those hurtful words and actions that 'killed' others. My blood has paid for your sin. Come to me, trust me for what I have done. Give up your independent attempts to fix yourself. Come to me. We have to love what God loves; we have to see other humans as immortal persons made in God's image; and see that God loves life, particularly the life of men and women made in his image. We have to have the courage and the humility to see what God sees and stare ourselves in the mirror and see that we are desperate, that we cannot fix ourselves and then we have to finally trust what he did and believe that the blood of Jesus has cleansed and forgiven us and that we are holy in God's eyes. The more we do this the more we will understand the sixth commandment and be able to live it out in the strength of God. May God help us to do that.