

Sermon for July 12th. 2026
SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS
Exodus 20:1-17

1 And God spoke all these words, saying,

2 “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

3 “You shall have no other gods before me.

4 “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. 5 You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, 6 but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

7 “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

8 “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. 11 For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

12 “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

13 “You shall not murder.

14 “You shall not commit adultery.

15 “You shall not steal.

16 “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

17 “You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's.”

Psalm 19

1 The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.

2 Day to day pours out speech,
and night to night reveals knowledge.

3 There is no speech, nor are there words,
whose voice is not heard.

4 Their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.

In them he has set a tent for the sun,
5 which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber,
and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy.

6 Its rising is from the end of the heavens,
and its circuit to the end of them,
and there is nothing hidden from its heat.

7 The law of the LORD is perfect,
 reviving the soul;
 the testimony of the LORD is sure,
 making wise the simple;
8 the precepts of the LORD are right,
 rejoicing the heart;
 the commandment of the LORD is pure,
 enlightening the eyes;
9 the fear of the LORD is clean,
 enduring forever;
 the rules of the LORD are true,
 and righteous altogether.
10 More to be desired are they than gold,
 even much fine gold;
 sweeter also than honey
 and drippings of the honeycomb.
11 Moreover, by them is your servant warned;
 in keeping them there is great reward.
12 Who can discern his errors?
 Declare me innocent from hidden faults.
13 Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins;
 let them not have dominion over me!
 Then I shall be blameless,
 and innocent of great transgression.
14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
 be acceptable in your sight,
 O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

Romans 6:1-11

1 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? **2** By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? **3** Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? **4** We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. **6** We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. **7** For one who has died has been set free from sin. **8** Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. **9** We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. **10** For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. **11** So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

12 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions.

Matthew 5:21-26

21 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' **22** But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will

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** Come to terms 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 until you have paid the last penny.

Our text for meditation this Sixth Sunday after Trinity is on our Psalm.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Introduction

The human heart is mostly wicked. Our Savior comments on it, saying “out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.”¹ Jeremiah the prophet tells us “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?”² It is the heart which is the dwelling place and seat of original sin – that is, our sinful nature. Sin dwelling in our hearts causes all sorts of horrible, evil desires that make us selfish, mean-spirited, and cruel.

Yet the Bible also has nice things to say about the human heart. Solomon writes, “Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.”³ The Psalmists speak of men who are upright in heart despite the presence of sin.⁴ While sin dwelling in us causes all sorts of problems springing up from the heart, there is something about human nature which connects us to God and beckons us to do better. So the Bible says that the human heart is bad...but then appears to say that it is good as well. What is going on here? Is this a contradiction? Thankfully it is no contradiction, and our Psalm for today helps us to understand it.

Two Things given to the human heart

You see my friends, sin saturates our natures and our hearts are corrupt on account of that, but God grants us two things to help us see what we *ought* to be. He has given us two advantages which point us to the original good that was with us when humanity was first created.

First, as the Psalmist says, the heavens declare the glory of God. It is so evident that there is a Divine Creator that no one can deny His existence honestly. We see it with the beauty of the natural world and our capacity to enjoy it: a beautiful sunset and a delicious meal both tell you that there is a God. In addition to this, the entire universe operates on *rules* that govern the motion of objects. Gravity pulls objects to the earth in predictable ways, the movement of planets and stars in space is predictable. Nature operates on observable laws, and if there are laws to nature then there must be a Legislator above nature who establishes them. The Psalmist even goes so far as to say that nature teaches us some things about God, and St. Paul concurs, saying “His invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.”⁵ The laws of nature demand a supernatural monarch who is above nature itself, and if that is the case then the God who made the universe is infinitely powerful. God has enabled our hearts to perceive Him as He reveals Himself through the proclamations of the universe; despite our sins, He has

1 Matthew 15:19

2 Jeremiah 17:9

3 Proverbs 4:23

4 Psalm 7:10, 11:2, 32:11, 97:11

5 Romans 1:20

ensured that everyone knows about Him.

Secondly we have a conscience, and this too is from God. The Law is written on our hearts, so that every one of us is made aware that there is such thing as right and wrong.⁶ The same recognition that we have deep down that there is an all-powerful God *also* tells us that this God *wants* something from us. Every culture all over the world has developed complex systems of morality and civil law, reflecting that inside every one of us is an intuitive feeling that *someone* is demanding our good behavior. Though this can certainly be suppressed for people who want to live in sin (the same way people can suppress the message of nature),⁷ even the most depraved degenerate still has an *instinct* for right and wrong.

Solving the Heart's Problems

So God has shown us that He exists, and He has brought us to an awareness of morality. There remains just one terrible problem: we are born in the dark when it comes to the details. So you know there is a God: which divinity should you believe in? So you know that morality exists: what are its precepts? One group of people worships the moon, another worships constellations, a third worships their ancestors. One group says stealing is always wrong, another says that stealing is only wrong under certain circumstances; one group enforces monogamy, another permits polygamy; one religion promotes peace, the other is warlike. These things that God has given our hearts, both awareness of His existence and rule, end up clouded by ignorance and sin until they give us no advantages. Mankind finds itself in a sorry state on account of such darkness.

Thankfully, God has given us the Word. Not only that, His Word has the Law, the topic that our Psalmist focuses on. The Commandments of God, especially the Ten Commandments, teach us what the moral instinct in our hearts is actually saying. To study them revives our soul by taking us out of the mind-fogging effects of sin. This Law takes us out of our foolishness and teaches us wisdom, for living by God's precepts gives us better lives than we would have if we let ourselves sin freely. The Psalmist says that the commandments *enlighten* our eyes, teaching us about God Himself. Think about it my friends! When the Law says “you shall have no other gods before Me,” this teaches us that our God is a jealous God, one who earnestly desires our worship exclusively: this tells us in no uncertain terms that He demands it because He loves us. By giving us the Word to read and the Ten Commandments to studiously obey, our Lord solves the problem of sin's effects on our minds, gives us tools to combat our own wickedness, and promises us great reward. No wonder the Psalmist says the Law is worth more than gold. Gold can make a man rich, but it cannot make him wise, or teach him anything about the true God: the Word does all this and more.

Conclusion: The Greatest Part of the Law

Yet for all of its benefits, the best thing the Law of God does is point us to something even greater: the Gospel. As the Psalmist praises the goodness of our Lord's Commands, he is made aware of his sins. The errors of his iniquities are before him, the shameful sins he cannot speak up are in the forefront of his mind. When he thinks of how many sins he *accidentally* commits, as the Mosaic code instructs us happens all the time, then he realizes his guilt. He asks our Lord for mercy and cleansing, that he may look upon the Word with joy again instead of shame. Though he may not have known the name “Jesus Christ of Nazareth,” the Law points our author to redemption from God Himself. “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.” He knows that his heart, and everything that flows from it, must first be made acceptable by our Lord Himself – and where did he get this information? By the Law, which taught him

⁶ Romans 2:14-15

⁷ Romans 1:18-32

that he cannot save his own soul.

The Word does the same for us my friends. We have broken every one of God's Commandments; even if a man were to sin only once in his life, this makes him a transgressor of all precepts.⁸ Though we may rejoice in the wisdom they bring us and the way they teach us to live, they reveal our guilt as well, and point us to the only way to forgiveness. We must entrust ourselves to our Lord, who gave His only begotten Son to die upon the Cross for all the punishment those sins merited. When we believe and place our destiny in the hands of Jesus, *then* we rejoice in our Rock and Redeemer. *Then* the other benefits of the Law come in full view. If we wish to sing as the Psalmist does with the same exultation, let us go to our Savior as he did, and rejoice in the free offer of forgiveness that we have in Christ. Then our hearts shall begin to be good as our Lord always intended them to be.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

8 James 2:10