

Sermon for July 27<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
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.”

Psalms 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 Gospel reading.

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

### **Introduction: Sticks and Stones**

There is an old saying that goes like this: “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words shall never hurt me.” The idea behind it is that words are simply words, sounds or markings on paper (or these days a screen), so they cannot inflict physical damage. A father might repeat this tired old line to his son after hearing that some mean children teased him at school. A mother might reassure her teenage daughter that the rumors spread about her are “just words,” and encourage her that she should move on. So the saying spreads in the hopes that people get “thicker skin.”

In recent years, anti-bullying campaigns have seen exponential growth because it turns out nobody really believes that old saying. “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words shall never hurt me.” Tell that to the people who live under constant criticism from their unpleasable spouses. “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words shall never hurt me.” Tell that to the victims of false accusations as they sit in prison. “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words shall never hurt me.” If you ever decide to tell a grieving widow that you are glad her husband is dead, get back to me after and tell me whether she was unaffected – assuming she doesn't knock out your teeth. At this point, no one thinks that words are harmless. Even though it is good to raise your children to have “thick skin” so to speak, it does not make them invulnerable to the great fires set by the untameable tongue of mankind.<sup>1</sup> The tongue is an instrument of murder.

### **Turning the Weapon on the Self**

Today's reading introduces this dynamic and expands on it. Our Lord Jesus tells us that the tongue is not just an instrument for killing *others*. It is also the tool by which countless men and women shall be damned, effectively committing spiritual *suicide*. It is not the words themselves which do this, so much as the intent behind them. The words you use make your heart, the very thing which God values the most, suspect. St. John tells us that we must love one another, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows Him. However, “anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.”<sup>2</sup> Your words to another believer – whom you are *supposed* to love – will reveal whether or not your heart really belongs to God.

If you are angry with your brother, you are liable to judgment. This is to say, if your brother or sister in Christ upsets you, then your motives must be examined, and I pray for your sake that you are the first to examine them and correct yourself. Perhaps you are justified in your anger; Christians sin all the time, and unfortunately we sin against *each other* quite frequently, so some momentary anger is expected, it's perfectly natural. But I advise you, judge that anger before God judges you. Does that anger reflect a refusal to forgive? Does that anger turn into boiling hate for a fellow believer, someone

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<sup>1</sup> James 3:3-12

<sup>2</sup> 1 John 4:3-4

that our Lord *died* to save? If so then beware, for the unforgiving one and the one who hates his brothers, if they do not repent, are hellbound.<sup>3</sup>

Our Lord brings up anger first, because it is from anger that the man is inspired to say things he may regret. But from there He mentions insults; in a more literal translation of the text, Christ says “whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!’” Raca is an Aramaic word which roughly means “empty-headed.”<sup>4</sup> It would be the equivalent of calling a fellow Christian an idiot. Bring this moment to judgment before *you* are brought to judgment. Did you mean those words? Was there real contempt for him behind it when you said it? Harmless teasing is fine. Using insults to cut someone down and wound their soul is deadly to your eternal fate.

Our Lord also brings up calling someone a *fool*. It may sound like He is just repeating Himself here. He just warned us for when we call someone “Raca” - or any other such insult. Why warn us about greater severity for calling someone a fool? Because to Christ's audience, a fool was not just a dunderhead; all throughout the book of Proverbs, the fool is presented as either amoral or immoral.<sup>5</sup> Our Lord is saying that you risk hell when you *condemn* someone as wicked, apostate, or lacking in character when you *know* that they are a brother or sister in Christ. This is someone who has been justified by faith in Jesus Himself, declared righteous by our Heavenly Father. To call them a “fool” or to revile their character in some other fashion is to effectively accuse God of *lying* or making a mistake. When you pronounce that condemnation on someone, no wonder you are at risk of damnation – you'd better make damned sure you are right, because if you are wrong then God treats it like blasphemy! And we know exactly what happens to blasphemers.

Now, on that topic, maybe you have leveled such an accusation at someone. But when you called that individual Christian an idolater, an apostate, wicked, or whatever else, you reasoned to yourself “well they weren't really a Christian anyway.” Are you sure? Do you know this person? Are you willing to risk eternity in hell for the brief satisfaction of attacking them? Unfortunately, too many people will find out – all too late – that they should never have taken that risk. By their tongues, by which I mean the outpouring of their rotten hearts, they have slain their own souls.

## Turning Away from the Ledge

As we speak, there are people who believe they are Christians who are in the process of sealing their damnation by their impenitent words and motivations. With what they say, with how they feel, they demonstrate to our God that they care nothing about Christ and the Cross on which He died for us. Such people deserve hellfire for their careless presumptions and foolhardy anger. Ironically, they feel quite righteous as they stand on the ledge of damnation. I am not alone in this interpretation by the way. Here is Luther's comment on this very passage:

Therefore, it is as if it were said: He who is angry in heart is already deserving of death before God; but he who goes further and says: Raca, or, Thou fool, has already had sentence pronounced upon him, etc. In short, he is already damned to hell fire who is angry with his brother. But he who says Raca, deserves to go still deeper into hell; still deeper, however, he who kills also with words and fist. So the punishment and condemnation is entirely one and the same, and yet the same is heavier and more severe as the sin progresses and breaks out more fiercely.<sup>6</sup>

My friends, turn away from the ledge before you fall off of it. Christ says that before you so much as make an *offering* at Church, before people would see you as a Christian, repent of this sinful anger towards your brethren. Forgive them. Note here that the first thing Christ tells us to do is be reconciled – not necessarily *in person*, for such things may not always be possible. Saying something

3 Matthew 6:14-16, 1 John 3:15

4 <https://biblehub.com/greek/4469.htm>

5 <https://www.gotquestions.org/fool-Proverbs.html>

6 From Luther's commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, found here: <https://godrules.net/library/luther/37luther1.htm>

nasty on the internet to a fellow Christian is not easily mended by direct apologies, or perhaps someone we offended shed their mortal coil before we could apologize. But that part of reconciliation is always secondary. More important to our Lord is that we change our *mind* and work on our hearts. Drop the silly anger, let the burning hatred of someone God loves be extinguished. There is a time and a place for righteous anger, but even then it must be brief, never permanent.<sup>7</sup>

## Conclusion

We have all been guilty of this errant anger and salty language towards our fellow Christians. If we hold onto it, then our Heavenly Father shall look at our faithlessness, and upon Judgment Day tell us “Ah, you like anger do you? Have as much as you like in the fires prepared for the devil and his angels, there you shall experience all the anger you could ever take – and infinitely more.”

The good news is that such a terrible fate is not *guaranteed*, beloved. Our Lord Jesus took all the Divine wrath which we deserve, paying the price on that Cross which we could never pay on our own. As we go forward, let us meditate on our unfounded hatred, anger, and reviling, and lay it all on the foot of the Cross. Let us request mercy from our Savior, and help from the Holy Spirit to keep us from offending once more.

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

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7 Ephesians 4:26-27