

The Sixth Sunday after Trinity

Matthew 5:17-26

I'm going to depart a little from our Gospel text today because of our circumstances although it does relate to today's Gospel reading. Hear the Word of God from 1 Timothy:

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. (1 Timothy 2:1-6)

God desires that all be saved and Jesus Christ is the mediator that makes salvation possible.

Jesus makes clear in today's Gospel reading that the Law is absolute: "For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished." (v. 18) This also means that we are in trouble!

Not one of us is righteous on our own merits. (Rom 3:10-18) We must have a mediator who fulfills the Law for us. Jesus has accomplished what we cannot: He has fulfilled the Law perfectly in our place which is His active obedience on our behalf. He has also accomplished the payment for our disobedience with His suffering and death which is His passive obedience on our behalf. He has accomplished every iota and dot of the Law and gives us His righteousness as a free gift.

Jesus says that our righteousness must exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees to have eternal life. (v. 20) We must have a foreign righteousness, that is, a righteousness not our own. "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." (Mk 16:16)

"But how are they to believe in Him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?" (Rom 10:14)

This is why we pray for a “peaceful and quiet life.” We want a life in which the Gospel of Christ may be proclaimed freely so that many might repent and believe in the Gospel.

God is a God of order, not disorder. (1 Cor. 14:33, 40; Col. 2:5) When Paul talks about this, he is talking about the Divine Service, but we can extend it to the rest of His creation. God has ordered His creation in such a way that all people might be saved.

He has established three estates for good order in the world. He has established the preaching office, marriage, and the civil estate. The “Table of Duties” in the Small Catechism reflect this order. These estates are distinct and work together to provide this order. They all are established by the Word and mandates of God and so they are Holy estates.

First, God established the preaching office for the proclamation of His Word and the distribution of His wonderful gifts of Baptism, Absolution, and the Lord’s Supper. He established the preaching office first with Adam when He commanded Him not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. (Gen 2:17) God established this office for the salvation of God’s people. Since we need an alien righteousness, we need to obtain Jesus’ perfect righteousness in the means that God provides through His church.

Second, God established marriage for the propagation of children in the world and dominion of that world. (Gen 1:28) God has established the family as the institution where children are brought up in the “discipline and instruction of the Lord.” (Eph 6:4) Families provide the building block of all societies and history has shown that when the family breaks down the society breaks down.

The preaching office and marriage were instituted by God before the fall into sin. If there were no sin in the world, there would be no need for the civil estate. But since we are corrupted from conception, the world is full of corruption. The hymn of the day expresses this poetically:

“Through all our pow’rs corruption creeps
and us in dreadful bondage keeps;
In guilt we draw our infant breath
and reap its fruit of woe and death.” (LSB 562)

God established the civil estate, or government, after the flood: "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in His own image." (Gen 9:6)

The three estates are distinct and work together. They have three things in common: 1) They are all instituted by God, 2) God gives commands to the office holders in each estate, and 3) God is present and working in each estate. They also have differences.

The church and civil estates cannot propagate by themselves. They need the family to provide members. The church serves the family estate with the Word of God and means of Grace. The civil estate, or local, state, and national government is supposed to protect the institution of the family and we see every day where our government is failing us and we will all suffer because of this.

The church and family estates are not estates of coercion. The third commandment teaches us how we are to receive preaching and God's Word, but we cannot force anyone to believe. The Word of God and natural law teach us how to order our families but we cannot force anyone to live in that order. The civil estate, however, is an estate of coercion. "For he does not bear the sword in vain." (Rom 13:4) The civil estate is meant to punish evil, reward good, and keep order in our society. (Rom 13:1-7)

Since God is acting through civil order and commands us, we must obey the civil authority even when they enact unjust laws. We submit, but we are not silent! It is the job of the church and Christian family to teach the civil estate what justice looks like according to God's good order. Natural law teaches what that looks like so anyone may know it, but only Christian's have the Holy Spirit who illumines God's Word which created the natural order.

Peter in Acts shows us that the government's power over the church is not absolute. When Peter and the Apostles are commanded not to preach Christ, they rightly obey God rather than man and keep proclaiming Christ. (Acts 5:29)

Where does the power of the government begin and end with the church? One of my fathers in the faith put it this way recently: "The government cannot and must not try to do what belongs to the church or interfere in the church's unique mandates. It cannot make a righteous people before God or save them from the wrath of God. It has neither

competence nor authority in matters of doctrine, sacraments, confession, worship, the preaching office or the church's life of fellowship."¹

The mandates of the church consist of preaching the Apostolic teaching, fellowship or mutual consolation of the brotherhood, the Lord's Supper, praise, hymns, and prayer. (Acts 2:42, Eph 5:19-20) Through these means God creates and sustains faith in His people. In the first three hundred years of Christianity, we see an extreme example of obeying God rather than man. Christianity was illegal, but thrived in home churches like we see in modern day China.

We are not in such extreme times, but the church is under attack. Governor Newsom, to my knowledge, has said little against the protests and rioting. There has been a concerted effort by the government and the press to not make any connections between the riots and an increase in COVID-19 cases. There is no explicit command addressing the riots, but the church has been commanded that it must meet outdoors.

In my understanding, the governor violates both the 1st amendment, or natural law, and God's Word, or the third commandment, when he dictates *how* we must meet. There are many seasoned pastors and theologians who agree with me. In this understanding, we must obey God rather than man. How we conduct our service is mandated by the Word of God and our pastors and council and not by the government.

However, we still act with humility towards the government. We take safety precautions out of love for our neighbor and a good faith effort to comply with the government's mandates. I've added an abbreviated service to these safety precautions in a good faith effort to minimize singing and our time together. We also understand that meeting outside at Grace poses some safety hazards for some of our people.

We are not allowed to get excited about defying the governor's orders. This is not rebellion for rebellion's sake but an attempt on our part to not hinder the Gospel which is the primary mission of the church.

There are other seasoned pastors and theologians who have a different understanding. There is room for this difference in understanding. We must not allow anger to be an opportunity for Satan to cause division. Let me leave you with a slightly modified quote from Romans:

¹ Rev. President John Hill, "The Family and and Home Education - A Biblical Study," 2020 Wyoming District Home School Conference, July 15, 2020.

⁵One person esteems [meeting inside as proper], while another esteems [not meeting inside as proper]. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. ⁶The one who [meets inside], observes it in honor of the Lord. The one [who doesn't meet inside,], observes it in honor of the Lord, [and both give thanks to God.] ⁷For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. ⁸For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. ⁹For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. (Rom 14:5-9)

Whether you are here in person or here from home, you are the Lord's!

Go in His peace!

In Jesus name. Amen.