

We had heard so much about this Jesus of Nazareth. He taught in our synagogues. He proclaimed the good news of God's kingdom. He even healed every disease and every affliction among us. It was enough to make great crowds of us from Galilee and the Decapolis, from Jerusalem and Judea, even from beyond the Jordan, to come out all that way and follow Him. And so seeing you and me, such a big gathering of peoples, Jesus went up and found a nice high spot to address us with His now famous Sermon on the Mount. Everyone was glued to Him, hanging on His every word. There we were, assembled at the foot of the mountain, listening intently. That is, until we got blindsided.

One moment, Jesus was saying, "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.'" Yes, yes, we smiled, that's what we learned back in Sabbath School class. Nodding in approval, we gave affirming glances to each other, for surely none of us had ever murdered anybody. But then the next moment, Jesus hit us from out of nowhere, "But I say to you," He says, "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." Those were hard words; difficult to hear; tough to take. We had never heard the Law interpreted in such a way, and it was more than we had bargained for.

That's the way a first century Jew would've heard Jesus' words. And, perhaps, that was *our* experience this morning. You and I also came here all the way from Vinings and Marietta, Smyrna and Mableton, even from beyond the Chattahoochee, just to listen to Jesus. Some of us may've known we'd be hearing about the Fifth Commandment today, "You shall not murder," and we might've thought, well this'll be a cinch, "I've never murdered anyone—and I never plan to!" But then Jesus blurs the lines and fuzzies up the edges for us, giving you and me a new definition of murder. This definition is so broad and so far reaching that nobody can escape—it convicts each and every one of us. And perhaps that's more than *we* bargained for today.

See, anything—any thought, any word, any act—*anything* that does harm to our neighbor whatsoever, according to Jesus, is murder. We don't have to lay a finger on them for their blood to be on our hands. In God's eyes, all we have to do is have hate in our heart and we are already standing over their corpse.

But Jesus doesn't just stop there—He takes things even further. He show us not only how we all *break* this Commandment, but then goes on to tell us what it takes to actually *keep* it. Jesus says, "Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you." In other words, if our neighbor has a need and we are in a position help them then we'd better *do it!* But if we don't, we're still convicted of murder by our *inaction*.

A few weeks ago, there was a story that hit the news. In Cocoa, Florida, five teen boys—between fourteen and sixteen years old—filmed the drowning of a disabled man for a whole two minutes. As this man struggled to stay afloat in a pond near his home, you can hear the chuckling of these teens in the background of that chilling cell phone video. It gives me goosebumps just to think about it—the man's final moments, and all you hear is, "You goin' die" and "We not gonna help you" and finally amidst plenty of laughter, "He dead." Apparently, the state of Florida doesn't have a law that requires citizens to render aid or call for help if someone is in distress. And so, the family is frustrated and the detectives are frustrated, because no one can be held accountable for such cruelty. But even if nobody else holds them accountable, God will.

How many people have you and I rushed by, brushed off, or flat out refused to help? Beggars holding up cardboard signs? Cars sitting on the side of the road, their hoods up? People in desperate need of favors, yet we say no? We are always in a hurry, no time to assist. We are so tightfisted, nothing to give. We are so self-absorbed—no patience, no sympathy, no ear to listen.

But God, well, He's not like us—God never breaks a Commandment, God always keeps His Commandments. And so, God fulfills this Fifth Commandment—He comes to help His neighbor, to protect them, to rescue them . . . from the likes of *us!* To keep you and me from hurting them anymore, to ensure they get the help they need when we refuse to lift a

finger, God comes to their aid—which means He comes after us! And you can't blame Him for doing so—God's gotta do what God's gotta do to keep His neighbor safe. And as you and I wait for the next shoe to drop, just when it's time to face the music—Jesus blindsides us yet again.

Ever heard of Pocahontas? Seriously, Pocahontas? Well, as legend has it, her father Chief Powhatan wanted to protect his people from the new English colonists pouring into their native land. Captain John Smith, the leader of these colonists, was a threat, so to keep his tribe safe—y'know help his neighbor—Chief Powhatan had little choice but to nip this problem in the bud. But then, in Smith's own words, the unexpected happened—"at the minute of my execution," he writes, "she [Pocahontas] hazarded the beating out of her own brains to save mine. "And not only that," he says, "but so prevailed with her father, that I was safely conducted to Jamestown." Later, Smith wrote again of his rescue, this time speaking of himself in the third person, "two great stones were brought before Powhatan: then as many as could lay hands on him [John Smith], dragged him to them, and thereon laid his head. And being ready with their clubs, to beat out his brains, Pocahontas the King's dearest daughter, when no entreaty could prevail, got his head in her arms, and laid her own upon his to save him from death." Imagine, as John Smith's head lay on the stone, clubs up in the air ready to come down, *then* Pocahontas sticks her neck out. Her head in the way, she was ready to do whatever it took to help her neighbor—even an enemy—in his time of need.

Just when God was coming our way to protect His neighbors from us, just as His wrath was kindled, ready to smite us, Jesus steps in, loving His enemy, praying for those who persecute Him, fulfilling this Commandment by helping and supporting even *us*, His neighbor, in *our* every physical need. Getting between us and God, as the club came down, Jesus got Himself killed trying to protect us. And bearing the brunt of God's righteous anger, Jesus begged from the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And so we are—Jesus has come also to *our* aid, He has helped us in *our* time of need. Because of Him, we are forgiven, we are safe, we are out of harm's way.

I don't know about you, but for me, being loved like that changes things. Even though I still fall short because of sin, somehow I just don't feel the same. Knowing such love, I can't help but love others in a whole new way. This outrageous, undeserved, generous love that's found its way into my heart, just has to come out. Now, people I never liked to begin with, I can't help but love. God's love's just got some kinda crazy hold on me.

And I'm not the only one—the Coptic Christians in Egypt know just what I mean. If you've been watching the news, you know there have been a number of terrorist attacks against the Church in that part of the world. For example, on May 26 more than 30 Coptic Christians were massacred on their way to a monastery; and a month before that, two churches were bombed on Palm Sunday, killing scores of Christians. Yet, because they know about Jesus' great love for them, they have used their situation as a platform to share that same love. One church leader said "There's a lot of talk about forgiveness and loving our enemies." And such a response of grace and forgiveness has left many Muslim communities in that area wondering how these Christians can be this way after having gone through so much. It's not hard to see the attention they're getting because of Christ's love in them, and the gradual change it's making to the cultural landscape.

Back in 2013, a brave clerk at an elementary school here in the Atlanta suburbs, also found out the power God's love has over man's hate. Maybe you heard about it—a gunman had holed himself up in the school with an assault rifle, claiming that he "had nothing left to live for" and threatening that he would "take all the cops and everybody with him." But on a recording of the 911 call, Antoinette Tuff, that brave school clerk, can be heard calmly talking the young man out of causing harm and reassuring him that giving up was the right thing to do. Amazingly, she is heard saying, "It's going to be alright, sweetheart," as the gunman discarded his weapon, emptied his pockets, and waited for police to enter the school. "I just want you to know that I love you though," she continued, "and I'm proud of you." Listen to what love like that did for this young man—later she reported, "He had me actually get on the intercom and tell everybody that he was sorry too." As the police finally entered, Tuff could be heard over the phone, breaking down and crying, "Oh Jesus!" Was that her breaking the Second Commandment, taking the Lord's name in vain? Some might think so, but those who know her best will tell you it was her faith in Jesus. Her words and actions gave witness to the source of her love and strength in that moment.

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The Fifth Commandment
Matthew 5:21-26, 38-48

Rev. David V. Miller
Lutheran Church of the Ascension
Atlanta, GA

Thank God for the Fifth Commandment! With it, we are pointed beyond our hate, past our refusal to help, to God's gracious love revealed in Christ Jesus. Because of His love for us, a whole new life has opened up before us. You and I are invited into the richness, the fullness, the beauty of a life lived in that love. It's walking in the wonderful footsteps of our Lord; it's helping to make this a marvelous place; it's touching lives the way He's inexplicably touched ours—that's the power of sharing the love of Christ. So, don't be afraid—I mean, we've already seen what a world of hate looks like, and we hate what we see. But love . . . well, just think how much you and I could fall in love with a world like that!

C'mon, let's go!