

Notes for Next Sunday
Sixth Sunday after Epiphany

The Point of this Week's Readings

Old Testament (Deuteronomy 30:15-20). Life is full of choices; few carry eternal consequences. But this choice – do we follow our covenant God, or do we go away to follow other gods? – was as important as life itself. Trusting the Lord and living His way isn't just the only way to stay alive; it's the only way life can be rich, full, and productive – the way He created it to be. Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10). God cannot give us happiness and peace apart from Himself, because apart from Him there is no real happiness and peace. To reject God's mercy and to seek greater joy and satisfaction somewhere else is the surest way to personal and national ruin. (PBC)

Epistle (1 Corinthians 3:1-9). As their spiritual father (4:15), Paul had fed these babies in Christ milk, not solid food (cf. Hebrews 5:12–14; 1 Pet 2:2). That was appropriate as long as they were still beginners in the faith. But milk should not remain the regular diet for those beyond infancy. Some four or five years had elapsed since Paul first planted the church in Corinth. By now they should have developed the capacity for solid food. There is a strong reproach in the words: "But you are not yet able even now" (3:2). Paul calls them to spiritual maturity. (CC p. 108)

Gospel (Matthew 5:21-37). This text is *not* a prescription for how a person may attain the righteousness that will allow him to gain entrance into the reign of heaven. Rather, here Jesus displays standards of spiritual greatness for disciples who already now receive the blessings of the reign of heaven through faith in him, and who will, by grace, fully enter the glories of that reign on the Last Day. The theme that runs all through this text is Jesus saying "But I myself am saying to you." This is a contrast between the Law of Moses and Jesus own teaching. The Law of Moses was great but the Jewish leaders had modified parts of it and made it less than what Scripture really said. (CC)

For more in-depth commentary on each reading, read the notes found after each text below.

OLD TESTAMENT – Deuteronomy 30:15-20

¹⁵ See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. ¹⁶ For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess. ¹⁷ But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, ¹⁸ I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. ¹⁹ This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live ²⁰ and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

30:12, 14 It is not up in heaven ... the word is very near you. † Moses declares that understanding, believing and accepting the covenant were not beyond them. Paul applies this passage to the availability of the "word of faith" (Ro 10:6–10). (CSB)

30:19 I call heaven and earth as witnesses. God informed Israel that His whole creation was summoned to testify that He had told His people in advance what the results of their choice would be: it was a matter of life and death. (TLSB)

30:19 choose life. The most important question you and I will ever have to answer is, “What do you think of Jesus Christ?” Every other question – Where should I live? Whom should I marry? What school should I attend? What career should I pursue? – pales by comparison. There are only two alternatives: “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him” (John 3:36). (PBC)

30:20 the LORD is your life. When they chose the Lord, they chose life (v. 19). In 32:46–47 “all the words of this law” are said to be their life. The law, the Lord and life are bound together. “Life” in this context refers to all that makes life rich, full and productive—as God created it to be. (CSB)

EPISTLE – 1 Corinthians 3:1-9

Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly—mere infants in Christ. ² I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. ³ You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men? ⁴ For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not mere men? ⁵ What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. ⁶ I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. ⁷ So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. ⁸ The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. ⁹ For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, God’s building.

3:3 like mere men. As they had not reached maturity, the spiritual outlook had not yet permeated the Corinthians’ thinking, which helps to explain many of the difficulties experienced in their community. *jealousy and strife.* Markers of immaturity (cf 1:11). *in a human way?* As a natural, fallen person. (TLSB)

3:6 God...makes thing grow. By the Spirit’s power through the Word proclaimed by the apostles. (TLSB) Because it is God who keeps giving the growth, “neither the planter is anything nor the waterer, but only God, who does the growing” (3:7). Back in 3:5, Paul had asked: “What, after all, is Apollos? What is Paul?” Now he answers, saying in essence, “We are nothing!” (cf. 2 Cor 12:11; Gal 6:3). Paul was keenly aware that the church lived totally by the grace of God, each church worker being totally dependent on God for any fruit in his ministry. What Luther wrote on the day before his death applies to all ministers of the Gospel: “We are beggars. That is true.” All glory for a fruitful ministry must be given to God alone. Whereas Paul and Apollos are nothing, God is everything. To emphasize this, Paul places “God,” θεός, last in 3:7. (CC p. 113))

GOSPEL – Matthew 5:21-37

²¹ “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ ²² But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell. ²³ “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift. ²⁵ “Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. ²⁶ I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.

5:22 fool. Duzzle Tier (German). Fool is a word of contumely (Rudeness or contempt in behavior or speech; insolence. An insulting remark or act) which is more forceful than “raca”; for “raca” belongs in sphere of the intellect, while “fool” touches upon the ethical domain. (Ylvisaker)

5:22 *hell*. Lit, rubbish pit near Jerusalem, where fire always smoldered. Symbolic of eternal punishment. “He says that we must not kill, neither with hand, heart, mouth, signs, gestures, help, nor counsel” (LC I 182). (TLSB)

5:24 *first go and be reconciled*. The first priority for a worshiper is to seek reconciliation with an offended believer. (TLSB)

5:26 *penny*. The end for someone who is angry with a fellow believer (v 22) and does not seek reconciliation (vv 24–25) is imprisonment. (TLSB)

²⁷ “You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ ²⁸ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹ If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

5:29 *gorge it out* Therefore, radical action must be taken over against lustful thoughts and desires, for in the sight of God such “inner adultery” is the same as the external action. To lose an eye or a hand is no small thing; neither will it be painless to turn aside from the temptations and habits of sinful lust. Left unchecked, such desires can lead to damnation. With a strong hyperbole the Lord lays out the options. Which is better for you? To be resurrected and then cast with your body intact into hell’s eternal torment, or the resurrection to eternal life without an eye or a hand? Be rid of such desires when they arise in your heart! (CC)

³¹ “It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’ ³² But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.

There was a debate between the schools of Hillel-Shammai. The school of Shammai took the phrase to mean “adultery,” which then was the only grounds for divorce allowed by that passage. But the followers of Hillel had a looser interpretation: (CC)

³³ “Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.’ ³⁴ But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God’s throne; ³⁵ or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. ³⁶ And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. ³⁷ Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

Just as OT Law permitted divorce, so also the swearing of oaths was allowed. Jesus condemned swearing falsely and breaking an oath. (TLSB)

5:37 *yes...no*. The truthfulness of a believer’s yes or no cannot be enhanced by swearing an oath, as Peter found out (26:72-74). (TLSB)