

## Sermon Text – Sunday, February 22, 2026 – Pastor Paula Kraus

**1<sup>st</sup> Reading: Deuteronomy 30:15-20; 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading: 1 Corinthians 3:1-9  
Reading for the Message: Matthew 5:21-37 “Worshipful”**

In what comes before our scripture today Jesus instructed his followers to ensure that their righteousness would exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees. Now Jesus’ is persuading them and us to be worshipful in all things. In what we read today, Jesus’ words take the “commandments” further than the strict-narrow interpretation of the religious leaders of the day. Jesus used the formula you have heard it said . . . but I tell you, this lends his own authoritative interpretation to the commandments. Jesus teaches how to be worshipful in all things.

“You have heard it said” is quite possibly Jesus communicating to his followers the extent of what the scribes and teachers of the law taught. Their strict / narrow interpretation allowed for loopholes and work arounds. Jesus offers an authentic interpretation of the word of God over against all previous understandings. Each of the four issues Jesus addresses in this passage can be dealt with in more than one way. We can be literal interpreters, viewing these four issues strictly and narrowly or we can consider how the commandments fit into loving relationships with God, others, and ourselves. Jesus’ concern is shown from a perspective of the greatest commandment – love God and love your neighbor as yourself.

Jesus mentions murders, of course “anyone who murders will be subject to judgment” that is a given and not subject to debate even in our society. However, are only murders subject to judgment? Jesus tells his followers that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Wait – Not all anger is evil – there is such a thing as righteous anger – even Jesus got angry once or twice during his ministry. Our Old Testament chronicles many incidents of the “wrath of God.” Righteous anger however should be slow to rise and quick to die down. Jesus goes beyond the usual interpretation of this commandment and addresses what is in the heart. Jesus refers to an “unrighteous anger” or the anger of pride, vanity, hatred, malice, revenge, even jealousy. “Anger and insult are ugly symptoms of a desire to get rid of somebody who stands in our way.”<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the man who tells his brother he is doomed to hell is in danger of hell himself.

---

<sup>1</sup> Stott, John R. W. *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*. IVP. 1978. Print. 85

## Sermon Text – Sunday, February 22, 2026 – Pastor Paula Kraus

Jesus gives two examples to drive home his point that reconciliation is better than the sin of anger. One takes place in a church with a brother “if you are offering your gift at the altar and then remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift and be reconciled to them.” The other example is to settle matters quickly with your adversary in court before the judge gets involved. His point in both cases is that one must reconcile with those you quarrel. Do not let the sun set on your anger, do not go to court over issues that can be settled graciously. Jesus is concerned with relationship and reconciliation – we must never allow an estrangement to remain and should take every possible step to live in peace and love with others. In that way you will be worshipful in your everyday life and your righteousness will exceed that of the scribes and pharisees.

What Jesus teaches next about adultery is also a message concerned with what is in the heart. For the Pharisees and scribes the sin of adultery was in the act itself. Nevertheless, God’s command not only includes adultery but also covetousness; Jesus takes the adultery thing a little further by telling his followers in essence, “any and every sexual practice which is immoral in deed is immoral also in look and in thought.”<sup>2</sup> The “if” statements that follow are not meant to be taken literally but are a warning to his followers that our vivid imagination is a precious gift of God and is to be used cautiously and respectfully.

It is an unfortunate truth that past zealots and followers of Jesus took things to the extreme in this regard – Jesus did not intend for his followers to maim themselves. His message was this; if looking at something causes your imagination to turn to sinful thoughts then don’t look (gouge out your eye). If touching something or someone and places you visit cause the same sinful thoughts or actions, then don’t touch (cut off your hand) or don’t go (cut off your foot). Even though, as Christians, one thing or another is permissible and in itself not sinful – it should be removed from your life if by looking, touching, or visiting causes you to sin. Something that causes you to have impure thoughts or leads to temptation and sinful action may not have the same effect on others – we as Christians are also cautioned to not judge others.

Divorce is a touchy topic, then and now. We should consider what Jesus says here in concert with what Matthew records Jesus saying in chapter nineteen of his Gospel. In both instances the focus of the Pharisees and their direct

---

<sup>2</sup> IBID 88

## Sermon Text – Sunday, February 22, 2026 – Pastor Paula Kraus

question to Jesus was divorce. Jesus is more concerned with the institution of marriage itself. So, in his response to the Pharisees when they came to test him, Jesus questions them about what is written in their Torah. “Haven’t you read that at the beginning the Creator “made them male and female” and said for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh? So, they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

For Jesus marriage was a binding of two people that people should enter lightly and the marriage bond should not be torn apart “for any and every reason.” The Pharisees considered divorce for any reason acceptable because Moses had commanded a certificate of divorce. Jesus’ concern was not only for the institution of marriage but also with how easily a woman could be cast aside in that patriarchal driven society. Today our society seems to be more enlightened, but divorce continues to be a painful condition thrust upon people who might just be unwilling to face the difficulties that come with the “binding of two people.”

You can and should hear in Jesus’ words concern for people and concern for relationships – it is about the others and is focused on “loving your neighbor.” You can hear that truth in what Jesus says about oaths. If you are honest in all things, if you treat others as you yourself would want to be treated, then oaths are unnecessary. I wonder if this is what the true meaning of his commandment, “You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name” (Exodus 20:7). Jesus does not say that swearing an oath is forbidden but he does say it is unnecessary – all you need is to say simply ‘yes’ or ‘no’. If you are a Christian and are known to be truthful, swearing an oath on God’s name is overkill. Why use many words when a few words get the job done? Succinctly say what you mean, and precisely mean what you say, keep your promises. If you do that you will earn the reputation as an honest person, a worshipful Christian.

Jesus told his listeners that he has not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets but to fulfill them. Jesus does not enact new legislation but offers his listeners a better understanding of following the law through the primacy of the love command. He instructs them to a more worshipful life, so that their righteousness will surpass that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law.

So, what does this mean for the church? Jesus teaches us how to be worshipful, not just in the sanctuary but in our everyday lives – out there in the

## Sermon Text – Sunday, February 22, 2026 – Pastor Paula Kraus

real world. We tell ourselves that God created humanity in God's image, Genesis 1:27 – "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" – this verse leaves no one out but includes all of mankind – so why do we have different standards for different people. Why do we judge others and hold on to anger seeking revenge and retribution? Bishop Desmond Tutu once argued, "Only together, hand in hand, as God's family and not as one another's enemy, can we ever hope to end the vicious cycle of revenge and retribution."<sup>3</sup>

When you search deeply in Jesus' words and interpret them for today's world – it's all about relationship. Jesus is helping the church learn ways to live peacefully with each other. Jesus is telling his followers and us to "renew worship, seek reconciliation, and restore sanity within and beyond the church" and when has that ever been more urgent a message than now!

Those of us who call ourselves Christian must realize the meaning of that word, it is "follower of Christ" and to follow Christ means more than just coming to church on Sunday mornings or Saturday evenings. It means do the things Jesus would do, follow his teachings, and be different from the world around you. Jesus' priority in his teaching was to instruct his followers concerning the importance of maintaining faithful relationships. That means you don't throw people away because of disagreement, you seek reconciliation. Following Jesus means we live with integrity, loving our neighbors, treating others with respect and dignity, and being truthful in all things – even when the truth is painful. May it be so.

---

<sup>3</sup> Desmond Tutu. *God Has a Dream*. Doubleday. 2004. 53-58