

August 30, 2015

Fifth Commandment

Matthew 5:21-22

Living the Word: Murder Is No Mystery

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"Colonel Mustard with the candlestick in the library." How many of you know that reference? Millions of older folks like us worldwide have played the murder mystery board game, *Clue*. Figuring out who did it -- who committed the murder -- is the object of this classic game.

Sometimes, in real life, murder mysteries are exceedingly hard to solve. But sometimes the perpetrators, the persons responsible for the murders, are obvious. Sometimes there is no mystery.

The roadside murders of a TV crew last week up in Virginia filmed by one of the victims, and by the murderer himself, who later posted the video on social media? No mystery there. Just mind-boggling, heartbreaking sadness for all involved.

Our first Bible reading today told the story of another tragic killing. But no mystery there, either. A man named Abel lay dead in a field. Who did it? Well, there weren't too many suspects available. Adam and Eve were the very first humans God created, and their first two children were Cain and Abel. Cain got angry at his brother, Abel, and murdered him. So who did it? There was literally no one else on earth to blame but Cain.

Jesus tells us today about another murder that is definitely not a mystery. Who did it, we ask? The answer, sadly, tragically, is obvious. Let's read again from today's Gospel

lesson. Jesus says, talking about the Fifth Commandment, *“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults¹ his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.”*

Who's guilty of those things? Me.

See, I grew up with three brothers, and Jesus says that everyone who is angry with his brother is liable to judgment, the same as someone who murders another person. So I'm in big trouble, because I got angry with my brothers all the time.

Jesus says whoever insults his brother, or calls someone a fool, will be held accountable just like a murderer. I've done those things. And worse. Haven't we all?

Who did it? Who's done these things? Me. And you, too, haven't you? We're all guilty. According to Jesus, the Fifth Commandment convicts us all. Our angry words, our insults, our cutting remarks on social media, our name-calling, our destructive family conflicts, our marriage battles, our anger-management issues, our petty squabbles with neighbors, our road rage, even our callous disregard for the needy and the poor and the suffering around us -- Jesus teaches us that it is all akin to murder. It's all just as bad, in God's eyes, as killing someone. I'll say it again. This Fifth Commandment convicts us all.

Who did it? Say that answer with me real softly, but be really honest and sincere about this in your heart. Who did it? Me. When we take to heart what Jesus says about murder, there is no mystery, is there?

In *Clue*, the board game, the game ends when someone figures out who did it. Fortunately, in the game of life, there are two even more important questions to answer.

Who did it? Me. Who forgave it? The answer is Christ!

Jesus hates our sins, but he loves us sinners! Jesus loves us so much, despite all our anger, hatred, and foolish bickering. He cares about us so deeply, even though we let him down and break his commandments. Jesus doesn't want to see me liable to judgment for all of the stupid things I've said to my brothers through the years. He doesn't want you punished eternally for the foolish, sinful things you've done in your family. So he took our punishment, didn't he? Christ, the Son of God, took on himself our judgment. He suffered in our place. He died for us. And Jesus accomplished, once and for all, our forgiveness.

Who did it? Me. Who forgave it? There's no mystery here, either. There's only one answer. There's only one way to forgiveness, one way to salvation, one way to heaven. Who forgave it? Christ!

And here's the third question. Here's the question that, when answered, can help our lives start to change, help our relationships begin to get better. Here's the question that helps us to start *Living the Word* a little bit better in our Christian homes.

Who can heal it? Who can heal the sinful impulses in me that make me angry at my brother? Who can heal the hostility that you feel today toward that person who gets under your skin every day? Who can heal it? The answer is not just Christ. The answer is an incredible, wonderful mystery. It's Christ in me. It's Christ in you.

This is truly an amazing mystery, but Christ -- who has all the power in the universe to change people and to solve conflicts himself -- chooses to work in you to get at that strained relationship you have with an adversary. Christ opts to work through you to help your family life at home be more peaceful. Christ chooses to work in us to make our communities better, to get our nation back on track.

How can our damaged relationships be healed? How can our families start *Living the Word*, and getting along better? It's an incredible mystery, and it's a remarkable process; but it's Christ in me, and it's Christ in you. Healing starts when we allow Christ to work in us, and through us.

Make a conscious effort this week to try to let Christ's love soften your view of that person you're battling with. Pray about that person. Ask Jesus to help you every single time you interact with an enemy. It's amazing how your view of a person can start to change, when you're talking to the Lord over and over again about that person.

And the same is true at home. Pray with your family. Read Scripture in your home. Talk about the Bible stories with your spouse and your kids. Say the words, "I forgive you," when you fight and make up. Ask God to help you be forgiving, when it's hard to do on your own. Little by little, Christ will work in you. Christ will work through your family. And the mystery of healing, the miracle of healing, will begin.

We're talking today about the Fifth Commandment. Who did it? Me. Who forgave it? Christ. Who can heal it? Christ in me. Christ in you. Amen.