

Sunday 9th Aug - The 6th Commandment: Do not murder

This morning we are continuing our sermon series called 'Just 10' looking at the wisdom of the 10 commandments and Jesus' teaching and priorities for ethical living. Last week many of us joined thousands online for New Wine Breaks out (which was excellent and is still available if you missed it), but at last week's 9.15am service Steve Bennett spoke at LCC about honour: children honouring parents and parents not exasperating children but bringing them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

Well for the next 2 weeks it's my turn to do murder and adultery... that is to say, look at the 6th and 7th commandments 'Do not commit murder' and 'Do not commit adultery'.

This could be a very short sermon. Murder? Adultery? I think we can all agree: Not good, don't do it!

But just when we think we can pack up and go home with a pat on the back for not murdering anyone recently, Jesus picks up this command and shines it right back at us in His sermon on the mount in Matthew chapter 5.

He digs beneath the surface to expose the root causes that can lead to murderous thoughts: rage, belligerence and insulting words. And as soon as we start to examine ourselves about our thoughts and emotions, we realise perhaps we are not so innocent after all.

One of the first Hollywood movies to make it into the cinemas following Lockdown is called 'Unhinged' starring Russel Crowe. With the tagline 'He can happen to anyone' Crowe plays a man who is cut up on the highway by a woman who becomes the target of his murderous road rage. The quote of the movie is '*I don't think you know what a bad day is - but you'll find out.*'

Now most of us I trust and pray will never be accused of murder, but how many of us suffer occasionally from anger, insecurity or thoughtless words? I bet we can all think of occasions where our words, tone or actions have stemmed from our tiredness, insecurity or physical or emotional pain. Even this week I had to apologise to someone for my 'assertive' (probably actually aggressive) tone when I was challenged over a thoughtless decision I had taken.

As in much of Jesus' teaching in the sermon on the mount Jesus raises the bar and asks us to examine our own thought life and to learn to nip anger in the bud before it grows into something more murderous and toxic.

Notice that he even puts a practical marker in place when he says in verse 23 that we should deal with disputes before we come to worship. He says before you bring your gift to the altar, leave it and go and be reconciled to your brother or sister first.

The origin of the word *Hypocrite* is from the 1st century word 'hypokrites', which means "an actor." To come to enjoy worship whilst harbouring unrighteous anger or bitterness in your heart is false hypocrisy.

Jesus says to avoid being a hypocritical worshipper we need to keep short accounts and learn the art of reconciliation.

The Apostle Paul agrees: 'As far as it depends upon you', he says, 'remain at peace with everyone.'

Christians are people who are willing to apologise first.

Instead of letting resentment fester, we need to be the ones to blink first, to apologise when we have got it wrong. Before we worship, count to 10, take the first step, send a text or simply say sorry for the situation.

Now I'm not suggesting that everything is reconcilable right now. After all we cannot be reconciled with the devil. We cannot be reconciled with someone who is hell-bent on attacking us. But we can still pray for them that they would turn away from evil, and that justice and peace will prevail. Now justice is different from revenge. One is from the conviction of the Holy Spirit, the other is from the condemnation of the devil. Sometimes for our part, we have to pray for soft hearts and thick skins.

At New Wine last weekend, David Stroud from New Frontiers shared that the church is facing an enormous challenge but also an enormous opportunity as we face the future in a post-Covid world. The combination of increasing needs coupled with decreasing resources means that life will become more painful for many people in our nation.

So as a church we have a choice to make. How will we react to the fear and increasing pain around us? Will we meet it with growing anger? Or will we learn the art of reconciliation? Will we let thoughts of blame and revenge spread like murderous gangrene in the community or will we work to promote forgiveness and a strong and stable community?

I believe we will see both approaches in the coming months, but Jesus calls us to be peacemakers. He calls us to flee from murder, especially in our thoughts, tone or comments. He calls us to leave enough time to avoid stress and pressure. Jesus calls us to be constructive on Facebook and social media, not divisive or abusive with our words and emojis.

To finish perhaps I can leave us with a couple of questions to reflect upon in this week ahead:

First: As far as it depends upon me, am I at peace with everyone around me?

Second: What is one thing I can do today to nip anger in the bud?

Third and finally: In this time of deep instability what is one thing I can do to point people to the Lord Jesus, our hope in the storm, the anchor for our souls and the rock of our salvation? Let's pray.