

HYMNS: 119 47 324 839 65 515

INTROIT: Psalm 119:1-8

Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the Instruction of the LORD!

Blessed are those who observe His Testimonies! They seek Him with all their hearts.

Indeed, they do nothing wicked. They walk in His Ways.

You Yourself have commanded us to keep Your Directions carefully.

Oh that my ways were steadfast, to keep Your Prescriptions!

Then I should not be ashamed when I look at all Your Commandments.

I shall praise You with an upright heart when I learn Your righteous Decisions.

I shall keep Your Prescriptions. Do not utterly forsake me!

COLLECT: O Lord, graciously hear the prayers of Your people, that we, who justly suffer the consequence of our sin, may be mercifully delivered by Your goodness, to the glory of Your name; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

READINGS:

Deuteronomy 30:15-20 Love the Lord your God; walk in His ways.

1 Corinthians 3:1-9 You are God's field, God's building.

Matthew 5:21-37 Jesus explains the Law.

Welcome to all worshipping with us today!

Pastor Peter Ziebell, Phone 0407583922.

Email him at paziebell@gmail.com or to the church office at draelc@gmail.com.

Please notify pastor of anyone who is unwell or in need of a visit.

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

¹⁵ “See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and calamity. ¹⁶ For I am commanding you today to love the LORD, your God, to walk in His Ways and to keep His Commandments, His Statutes and His Decisions, that you may live and become numerous, and that the LORD, your God, may bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. ¹⁷ However, if your heart turns away, and you do not listen but are led astray, worship other gods and serve them, ¹⁸ I have been telling you today that you people will certainly be ruined. You will not live for long in the land that you are crossing over the Jordan to enter and to possess. ¹⁹ I call on heaven and earth as witnesses against you today. I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Therefore, you shall choose life, that you and your descendants may live, ²⁰ that you may love the LORD, your God, that you may listen to what He says and cling to Him! For He is your life and your length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the LORD has promised with an oath to give to your forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.”

1 Corinthians 3:1-9

¹ Fellow-Christians, I could not speak to you as spiritual people but as worldly people, as infants in Christ. ² I gave you milk to drink, not solid food, because you could not receive it yet. Indeed, even now you cannot receive it. ³ For you are still influenced by your sinful natures. For, when there are jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not influenced by your sinful natures and living by human standards? ⁴ When one says, “I belong to Paul,” and another, “I belong to Apollos,” are you not being like ordinary human beings? ⁵ What is Apollos? Or what is Paul? They are ministers through whom you have become believers, and each one has had what the Lord has assigned him. ⁶ I have planted, Apollos has watered, but God has caused the growth. ⁷ Therefore, neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything but God, who causes the growth. ⁸ The one who plants and the one who waters are one, and each will receive his own reward according to his own labour. ⁹ For we are God’s fellow-workers. You are God’s field. You are God’s building.

Matthew 5:21-37

²¹ “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago: ‘**You shall not murder**, and whoever murders will be subject to the judgment.’ ²² However, I

tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to the judgment. Anyone who says to his brother, ‘You numbskull!’ will be subject to the Sanhedrin. However, anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be subject to hellfire.

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 away and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift! ²⁵ Agree quickly with the one who wants to sue you, while you are still with him on the road, lest your accuser should hand you over to the judge, and the judge should hand you over to the officer, and you should be thrown into prison! ²⁶ Truly, I tell you, you will certainly not get out of there until you have paid the last cent.

²⁷ “You have heard that it was said, ‘**You shall not commit adultery!**’

²⁸ However, I tell you that everyone who looks at a woman to desire her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹ If your right eye causes you to stumble, take it out and throw it away from you! It is better for you that one of your members should be lost than that your whole body should be thrown into hell. ³⁰ If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away from you! It is better for you that one of your members should be lost than that your whole body should go into hell.

³¹ “It was said: ‘Whoever divorces his wife **must give her a certificate of divorce!**’ ³² However, I tell you that everyone who divorces his wife for any reason except sexual unfaithfulness causes her to be an adulteress, and whoever marries a woman so divorced commits adultery.

³³ “Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago: ‘**You shall not swear falsely but shall perform your oaths to the Lord!**’ ³⁴ However, I tell you not to swear at all, not **by heaven**, for **it is God’s throne**, ³⁵ and not by **the earth**, for it **is His footstool**, and not by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. ³⁶ Do not swear by your head either! For you cannot make one hair white or black. ³⁷ Rather, let your language be, ‘Yes, yes,’ ‘No, no!’ Anything more than these comes from the Evil One.

A NEW HEART CREATED IN US
Sermon for the 6th Sunday after Epiphany, 2023
Matthew 5:21-37

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is the Gospel from before, Matthew 5:21-37: **“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago: ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be subject to the judgment.’²² However, I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to the judgment. Anyone who says to his brother, ‘You numbskull!’ will be subject to the Sanhedrin. However, anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be subject to hellfire.**

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 away and be reconciled with your brother; and then come and offer your gift! ²⁵ Agree quickly with the one who wants to sue you, while you are still with him on the road, lest your accuser should hand you over to the judge, and the judge should hand you over to the officer, and you should be thrown into prison! ²⁶ Truly, I tell you, you will certainly not get out of there until you have paid the last cent.

²⁷ “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery!’²⁸ However, I tell you that everyone who looks at a woman to desire her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹ If your right eye causes you to stumble, take it out and throw it away from you! It is better for you that one of your members should be lost than that your whole body should be thrown into hell. ³⁰ If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away from you! It is better for you that one of your members should be lost than that your whole body should go into hell.

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³³ “Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago: ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord!’³⁴ However, I tell you not to swear at all; not by heaven, for it is God’s throne;³⁵ and not by the earth, for it is His footstool; and not by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. ³⁶ Do not swear by your head either! For you cannot make one hair white

or black. ³⁷ **Rather, let your language be, ‘Yes, yes;’ ‘No, no!’ Anything more than these comes from the Evil One.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your Truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Over the past couple of weeks, and again today, our Gospel reading comes from Matthew 5, where Jesus’ gives His Sermon on the Mount.

There is no doubt that Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount is the most famous sermon to be preached, but perhaps it is also the most misunderstood. It is not a summary of the whole Christian faith. Actually, it is safe to say that a person who claims to find his entire religion in this sermon is not even a Christian, and no one who hears or reads this sermon by itself, apart from the rest of Scripture, will come to an understanding of the Christian faith.

To understand this sermon, we must remember the audience to whom it was preached and the purpose Jesus had in mind. The audience was primarily Jesus’ disciples, although the large crowds who had been following Jesus were evidently in the background listening in. The sermon’s purpose was to give His *believers* a better understanding of the God-pleasing Christian life. Unbelievers could hear this sermon, but it would remain a mystery unless the Holy Spirit worked faith in their hearts.¹

In this section of Jesus’ sermon, He quotes from the Ten Commandments, particularly the *Fifth and the Sixth Commandments*. Originally, the Ten Commandments were given to the Israelites when God spoke to them from Mount Sinai. Now, if they were never mentioned again in any other place, perhaps we could say they were given only for the nation of Israel *in that time and place*. However, since Jesus is speaking of them, He is teaching His Church of all times how she is to regard these Commandments. And if you thought that Jesus might back off a little about the Ten Commandments, think again. Jesus not only asks us to keep the Ten Commandments as they were given to Israel, but He raises the bar by several orders of magnitude.

Jesus begins by quoting the Fifth Commandment: **“You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be subject to the judgment.”** Murder is the taking of human life without just cause or due process. But then Jesus raises the bar by saying,

¹ 1 Corinthians 2:14

“However, I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to the judgment. Anyone who says to his brother, ‘You numbskull!’ will be subject to the Sanhedrin. However, anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be subject to hellfire.” The saying goes, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me.” Jesus says the opposite. If you even insult someone, it is equal to murder.

He then mentions adultery. This is what we learn in the Sixth Commandment. Jesus says, **“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery!’”** Adultery is any sexual activity outside of marriage. But then Jesus raises the bar to include even our thoughts. **“However, I tell you that everyone who looks at a woman to desire her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”** The religious teachers of the Jews had rightfully condemned the act of adultery. Still, Jesus points out that sexual lust, *the desire* for sexual involvement with anyone other than one’s wife or husband, violates this commandment in God’s sight. Someone will undoubtedly respond, *“That’s only normal and natural. I can’t help it if desires are aroused in my heart at the sight of a person of the opposite sex.”* That may be true, but that does not make it right.

By the time Jesus gets through the Ten Commandments, we must admit that we break them daily. Actually, we have gotten so used to breaking them that we don’t even notice. In the Small Catechism, Martin Luther asks, *“What sins should we confess?”* His answer is this: *“Before God we should plead guilty of all sins, even of those that we do not know, as we do in the Lord’s Prayer.”*

Then, if we are tempted to think that sins are not all that serious, Jesus tells us to amputate all the body parts that cause us to sin. He says, **“If your right eye causes you to stumble, take it out and throw it away from you! It is better for you that one of your members should be lost than that your whole body should be thrown into hell.³⁰ If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away from you! It is better for you that one of your members should be lost than that your whole body should go into hell.”** You know, it is pretty severe stuff when Jesus starts talking about hell.

Jesus’ comments on this matter are often regarded as figurative language. Does He really mean to say that we should gouge out an eye or chop off a hand? Yes, He means exactly that! If it really is the fault of your eye or your hand that you commit sin that could condemn you to hell, wouldn’t you really want to rid yourself of that offending part of your body rather than having your whole body cast into hell? You would not hesitate to have a cancerous member of your body removed before the cancer destroys your entire body. People do that all the time. So also, removing a

treacherous member of your body would be a small enough price to pay to save your soul from the eternal torments of hell. It would be the reasonable thing to do.

The point Jesus wanted to make, however, was that such maiming of one's body would not be the real solution. If your right eye and hand cause you to sin and you were to get rid of them, would not the left eye and hand still cause you the same problem? If a person amputated his limbs, gouged out his eyes, and stopped up his ears, would he then be able to keep himself pure? Is it not more likely that *his heart* would then constantly dwell upon acts that had become physically impossible for him? And that's the point.

The true cause of sin *is not* the eye or the hand but something else. What is it?

At one time, Jesus had a discussion with the Pharisees and teachers of the law regarding placing man-made traditions above God's Commandments. After asking them why they broke God's Commandments for the sake of their traditions, He finished by telling them, "*Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, and slander*" (Matthew 15:19). It is not the hands or the eyes that need amputating. No, the seat of our sin is in our hearts. We need to get rid of our sinful hearts. It is as the Holy Spirit had also many years ago inspired Moses to write: "*The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually*" (Genesis 6:5).

So how do we get rid of our sinful hearts?

We can't, so the Lord comes looking for them. God wants our filthy, sinful hearts so that He can destroy them. God is not interested in receiving our hearts as a gift - as some kind of action on our part. No, He takes our hearts and puts them to death. As the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to say, "*Do you not know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into His death?*" and, "*We know that our old self was crucified with Him, that our sinful bodies might be rendered powerless, that we might not be slaves to sin any longer*" (Romans 6:3, 6), and again, "*Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified their sinful natures with their passions and desires*" (Galatians 5:24). When Jesus went to the cross, He took our filthy, toxic, sinful hearts with Him. With His death, He put those hearts to death.

What about the big empty space left behind? We can't live without hearts. How does God address this problem?

We sing the answer to that question almost every Sunday: "*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Your presence; and take not Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your*

salvation; and uphold me with a willing spirit.” This is a prayer that asks God to create a clean heart to replace that old, sinful heart that Jesus has taken to the cross.

This also happens in Holy Baptism. Even as the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write about the removal of the old heart, He also inspired Paul to tell of the new. Paul said, *“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things have passed away. Look! They have become new!”* (2 Corinthians 5:17). And, *“If we have been planted together with Him in the likeness of His death, then we shall be planted together with Him also in the likeness of His resurrection”* (Romans 6:5). Again, *“If we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him”* (Romans 6:8). When the Holy Spirit plants faith in us, He carries out a heart transplant. He removes our filthy hearts of sin and replaces them with the clean and holy heart of Jesus Christ Himself.

Now, although we have the holy heart of Christ within us, we still live in a sinful world. Temptations still attack us from all directions, and we often suffer defeat. That is when our new hearts convict us of sin and drive us back to the cross. Once again, we confess our sins and receive forgiveness for all our sins. In this way, God keeps our new hearts clean until He takes us away from this world of sin to live with Him forever, where our hearts will never be sinful again.

Every one of us was born with a toxic heart. It was a heart that loved sin and hated God. Over time our continuous sinning only made our hearts blacker and more toxic. There was no way that we could give our hearts as a gift to God. Instead, God took our filthy, sinful hearts and destroyed them at the cross. Now through Holy Baptism, He gives us His heart - by the power of that heart we fear, love and trust in Him above all things - we turn to Him in time of trouble - and when temptations overwhelm us, His heart draws us to Him in confession in the sure and certain knowledge that God loves us for Christ’s sake and will forgive us. Because Christ has given us His heart, we shall live with Him in heaven and rejoice before His throne forever. This is the new heart that God has created in us. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

The Lord’s Supper has always been seen as a sign of unity between those who commune together at the Lord’s table (1 Cor. 10:17). When Christians partake of the Lord’s Supper in a church body that has a confession of faith, they thereby declare that they believe that they are one in faith with those who commune with them. Since people cannot honestly hold two differing confessions at the same time, they cannot honestly commune with those whose confession is in conflict with their own. If any do this nevertheless, they deny their own confession, and so deny Christ Himself (2 Cor. 6:14-18). **We ask visitors who are communicant members in a church not in fellowship with the AELC, or are not familiar with the *AELC Statement of Faith*, to refrain from communing today. If you have questions, please speak with the pastor after service.**

PRAYER FOR THE SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

O God our Father, You are our rock and our fortress, our joy and our salvation, our light and our life, our sun and our shield. You are always ready to hear those who come before You. Therefore hear us as we come before You with our prayers and praise.

We thank You that You have called us by Your Spirit to believe in Your Son Jesus Christ, made us citizens of His eternal kingdom, given us righteousness as our dress, and equipped us with power, love, and self-control. Continue to give us these blessings, and fill us with the fruits of faith. Make us living letters that speak of Jesus Christ, that people around us may read of Your mercy and saving power in human lives.

We praise You for Your grace in calling us to work in Your vineyard. Bless our work, witness, and giving, in Your name. Use us to bring many people to Your glory. Make us glad to obey Your great commission, ready to accept every service, eager to perform every duty well, and strong to do every task faithfully. Make us patient and willing even when service in Your kingdom is long and difficult. Give us the joy of seeing others come to worship You, and give us the grace to welcome them warmly as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Keep us all safe in Your loving care, and lead us to the heavenly land of promise. Grant that we may run our daily race by the presence and power of Your Spirit. Give us self-control over everything that could endanger our faith and disqualify us for the prize. Grant that we may seize every opportunity to live the new life. Prevent us from boasting in our own wisdom, wealth, or power. Enable us to glory only in knowing You as our Father. May our only treasure be to possess Your wisdom and power in the life, death, and resurrection of Your Son.

Be with us, dear Father, in all that we do. Strengthen and direct us in our daily work. Protect us in our leisure. Shelter us in our homes. Guide us as we travel. Teach us in our problems. Shield us in our afflictions. Comfort us in our sorrows. Hear us as we pray, and lift up our spirits to You as we worship.

Accept these sacrifices of humble prayer and joyous praise that we offer before You, for the sake of Jesus Christ. And to You, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, be all glory and praise, for ever and ever. Amen.

Daily repentance - continued conversion

If we do not weed a garden, the weeds will choke out the plants that we want to grow. If cancer in a person's body is not cut out or killed, it will kill the person. The same thing is true of evil thoughts and deeds. Our lives are a daily return to our baptism, through which we have died to sin and made alive in Christ. Paul writes, *"Therefore, we were buried with Him through baptism into death, so that, as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might begin to live a new life"* (Rom. 6:4). Jesus told His disciples to root pride from their lives lest they perish. *"Truly, I tell you, unless you are converted and become like little children, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven"* (Matt. 18:3-4). The writer to the Hebrews encouraged believers to *"throw off everything that hinders"* (Heb. 12:1). Paul wrote, *"Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified their sinful natures with their passions and desires"* (Gal. 5:24). He also encouraged Christians to "put off" the deeds of the old man and to "put on" the deeds of the new man (Eph. 4:22-24).

It is true that a believer cannot keep evil thoughts from tempting him. He still has the old Adam with him. A believer who is tempted has not lost his faith, however. Luther put it this way: *"It is impossible to keep the devil from shooting evil thoughts and lusts into your heart. But see to it that you do not let such arrows (Eph 6:16) stick there and take root, but tear them out and throw them away. Do what one of the ancient fathers counselled long ago: 'I cannot,' he said, 'keep a bird from flying over my head. But I can certainly keep it from nesting in my hair or from biting my nose off.'"*

Believers can't stop temptations from coming into their lives. They can, however, by the power of the gospel, stop sin from taking over their lives. Those who recognise the power of the enemy within each of us (our sinful nature) will not indulge their flesh. Rather, they will crucify it by daily repentance. This has also been called continued conversion.

Children's Message:

We all have plants at home. Plants are really amazing. They start as just a little seed in dirt and then, after you plant and water them, out comes this amazing, beautiful thing.

What do plants need to grow? Soil, water, air, sunlight. Think about water. Some plants are watered by the clouds. Other plants we need to water with a watering can. Sometimes God provides for plants by using clouds for rainwater, and sometimes God uses us and our watering cans. But either way, who gets credit for this miracle of life? God and only God! God made the plants. God made oxygen and water and sunlight and dirt. God makes clouds. God made *me*. So when a plant is cared for, we give God all the credit. In a similar way, if I grow in my faith - or if you grow in your faith - who gets the credit for us growing? God and only God. Only He can give eternal life.

Now, God uses all sorts of people and things to help us grow. God uses the water of Baptism to give us life. God uses simple words of a sermon to teach us and make us grow. God uses the bread and wine of the Supper to feed us. And God uses people. Who are some people God uses to tell us about Jesus? Mum, dad, pastor, Sunday School teachers, etc. God uses lots of people to teach us about Jesus. And when faith grows in you, who gets credit for the miracle? Only God.



One way Christians say this is “To God alone be the glory!” Jesus has died for all my sins. “To God alone be the glory!” When someone becomes a Christian and is baptised, we can say: “To God alone be the glory!” When a sermon is really good, who gets the credit? “To God alone be the glory!” When a person repents of his sin and receives forgiveness, “To God alone be the glory!” And when a church grows and more people come and fill the pews, “To God alone be the glory!” God is the giver of every good and perfect gift (James 1:17), and He should get all the praise for all these

good things. So you learn about Jesus from many different people, but remember, who alone can make your faith grow? God and only God! To God alone be all the glory!

Dear God, thank you for my faith. Thank you for my pastors, teachers, parents. Thank you for making my faith grow. Thank you most of all for Jesus. In his name we pray. Amen.

WEEKLY ANNOUNCEMENTS

19 February The Transfiguration	ASH WEDNESDAY	26 February 1 Lent
8.30am OAK LR 9.00am TMBA HC 9.00am GRN LR 10.45am AUB HC 9.00am LOWOOD LR	Wed. Feb 22. 7.30pm Vespers at Aubigny. Thurs. Feb 23. 7.00pm HC at Lowood.	8.30am OAK LR 9.00am TMBA LR 9.00am GRN LR 9.30am AUB LR 9.00am MARBURG HC
Sunday, 19 February		
READINGS: Exodus 24:8-18; 2 Peter 1:16-21; Matthew 17:1-9		
HYMNS: 747 37 528 (71 292) 272		
ASH WEDNESDAY		
READINGS: Lowood: Joel 2:12-19; 2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10; Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21		
HYMNS: AUB: 49 361 395 48 v.3 LOWOOD: 49 361 395 71 84 48 v.3		
Sunday, 26 February		
READINGS: Genesis 3:1-21; Romans 5:12-19; Matthew 4:1-11		
HYMNS: 78 195 756 (789 847) 384		

Thursday, 16 February, 10.00am. Bible Study at Lowood.

Bible Studies on the Downs will recommence after Easter.

Saturday, 25 February, 10.00am. The Bookclub will be meeting at the manse. Please read pages 73-167 of *I Don't Have Enough Faith to be an Athiest*. Also, bring along something for a shared morning tea.

AGM Dates:

Greenwood - Tonight, 7.30pm.

Oakey – Sunday, 19 Feb, 1.30pm.

Marburg – Sunday, 26 Feb, after service.

Lowood – Sunday, 19 March, after service.

Parish - Sunday, 30 April, after the AELC Service to be held at Oakey.