

What kind of community do we want to live in? What do we want to uphold as our group norms? What is to be avoided? What is acceptable? What is best for everyone? This, I think, is what Jesus is aiming at in this morning's Gospel. He has just called the first disciples to leave their fishing nets and follow him to become fishers of people. He then takes them with him as he goes throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.

Jesus is teaching his disciples how to live full and happy lives. He is letting them know that they can't just do whatever they like and still be able to follow him. Becoming Jesus' disciple means letting one's life be slowly transformed from the ways of the world to the ways of the kingdom. As his disciples learn what these ways are, they make mistakes. Jesus doesn't condemn them for the mistakes they make: he forgives them.

This morning's Gospel is hard. It mostly tells the disciples what not to do. Without the rest of the teaching in the New Testament, we would be left with a list of what to avoid, rather than with an invitation to aspire to. So, what if we were to listen to this morning's teaching from Jesus, and then balance it with something to aspire to?

Matthew 5:21-37

1. 'You shall not murder', In other words, don't cause anyone's death, including all the little deaths we inflict on one another by staying angry at one another, or insulting one another, or ridiculing one another. Instead of talking about one another behind each other's back, "First be reconciled to your brother or sister" in Christ.

Ephesians 4

¹⁵But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and knitted together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

2. 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. In other words, pursuing or dwelling in thoughts about getting something that is not rightfully ours to have, is to put ourselves on a slippery slope.

it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. (tear out your eye, cut off your hand).

1 Corinthians 6

¹⁵Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? ¹⁹...your body is a temple*of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, ... you are not your own ²⁰...therefore glorify God in your body.

3. The result of divorce is adultery.

John 4

But Jesus doesn't condemn the woman at the well. He sets her free by telling her the truth in love.

4. Making oaths: Don't do it. Just say what you mean. In other words, be frank rather than manipulative or duplicitous.

1 Peter 3

¹³ Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? ¹⁴But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear,* and do not be intimidated, ¹⁵but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord.

SUMMARY

Luke 6

'But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ³¹Do to others as you would have them do to you... ³⁶Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

So, what if we were to aim for vitality in Christ, and in our family, and in our friendships, and in our personal lives and in our parish? Keeping our priorities in order can help.

1. Sleep well

Ps. 127 v. 3

It is in vain that you rise so early and go to bed so late; *
vain, too, to eat the bread of toil,
for he gives to his beloved sleep.

2. Eat a healthy diet
3. Move
4. Pray
5. Waste time with those you love
6. Work

In conclusion, let's hear from what was read from Deuteronomy again:
"Choose life... loving the LORD your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him;
for that means life to you..."