

Text: Exodus 20:14

You shall not commit adultery.

Prayer of the Day:

O God, you have prepared joys beyond understanding for those who love you. Pour into our hearts such love for you that, loving you above all things, we may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Verse of the Day:

Mark 8:34b

Alleluia. If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.
Alleluia.

Sermon Text:

Dear friends, I think I'll begin with a confession. Ever since we decided to undertake a Catechetical review over the summer months each year beginning first with the 10 Commandments, I have been dreading this particular week. It has left me feeling a bit like our confirmands every year as the topic arrives in class. Oh, not because I'm bashful. I've talked about the Sixth Commandment for 16 years of ministry now and discussed its contents with many a bride and groom, counseled more than a few married couples about its meaning. No, it's because I'm concerned about what a clear confession regarding the Sixth Commandment might bring on in this world of ours today. Let's admit it, the Sixth Commandment is broken in just about every way imaginable. Not just broken, but the sins against this commandment are openly celebrated by our media, our politicians, on our streets, and in our schools. Who knows, even saying that might just be enough to get us tossed into the media blackout circle that has come to be known as Social Media Jail.

Then there are the multifaceted age groups we have gathered together in our services. How do we communicate this in a public forum with many different levels of maturity listening in? Make no mistake about it, even the youngest among us are being subtly, and not so subtly, taught any number of things in cartoons, music, and advertising. We need to talk to them, but how do we do that without encouraging an interest in the very thing we are trying to help them avoid? How do we have a conversation while still listening to Paul's inspired words of wisdom in Ephesians 5:12 where he writes, "*It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret*"?

I believe the answer comes as we consider the words of Martin Luther's explanation of this commandment for us. *We should fear and love God that we lead a pure and decent life in words and actions, and that husband and wife love and honor each other.* It turns out that God is enforcing a valuable moral standard as He addresses us in this command. **PURITY IS IMPORTANT** to Him.

As we contemplate that statement notice too that Luther's explanation is really divided into two thoughts: a general exhortation that is of value for all and then the specific application to husband and wife.

When we talk about adultery, we rightfully think of what we have come to call cheating in a marriage. Marriage is a sacred institution given to us by God all the way back in the garden of Eden as our first lesson pointed out. Jesus tells us that this institution once embarked upon is not to be ended for every whim of fancy or any fleeting fight. In fact, the Scriptures point out that except for adultery (Matthew 5:32) or malicious desertion (1 Corinthians 7:15) should marriage be ended, it is sin. Jesus even goes so far as to say that when marriage is dissolved for reasons other than those previously mentioned, the parties should remain unmarried the rest of their days.

However, sinning against the 6th Commandment isn't something that only Husbands and Wives can do. In Hebrews 13:4 we hear, *"Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral."* So any sin (thought, word, or action), which would undermine the high regard that God has for the institution He has created and which He alone regulates, breaks this commandment as well. Unmarried people who pretend that it is okay to enjoy the blessings of marriage outside of God's declaration that they are husband and wife, relationships which clearly militate against the concrete definition that God has given of one man and one woman under one God in one relationship for life, the images we view, the thoughts that linger longer than they should (which is to say at all), yes, even something as simple as joking that the wife is the "old ball and chain" who stops all the fun or that the husband "needs to be trained" as if he is a common house pet, anything that fails to love, honor, and cherish God's gift of marriage and the way we are to enter into it, all of it God calls sin in this commandment. Married or not this command of our God can be and has been shattered. God means it when He announces, *among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people* (Ephesians 5:3).

So, why is God so serious about the purity of heart and mind of His people? Perhaps our second lesson pointed it out the best. We usually get so caught up in the roles of men and women that we miss it. In verses 22-27, the husband is the very picture of Jesus Christ and the bride the picture of the church. When marriage is assaulted or attacked, either in thought, word, or deed, Jesus and His relationship with the Church is assaulted and attacked. I have always remembered the words of a fellow pastor who lamented manifold atrocities which are now labeled as perfectly fine in our society and then commented what hurts the worst is that if we just would have honored marriage the way God had told us, none of this would even be thinkable. Once again, I find myself slumping to the ground in grief, unable to lift my head even to cry out to God because I know I have contributed to the dysfunction of the world around me rather than being a bright and shining light of this treasured institution which God has given.

But the hope in our despair is also found in those very words which would ask the impossible of us. ²⁵ *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her* ²⁶ *to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word,* ²⁷ *and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless* (Ephesians 5:24-27).

Christ is the very picture of purity. He didn't fear the repercussions of calling out the sin around Him. He perfectly protects this institution. In our Gospel lesson, He decries divorce. With the woman at the well, He points out that she has had many husbands and currently lives with a man who is not her husband (John 4:18). He tells the adulterous woman about to be stoned to death for her sin to "go and sin no more" (John 8:11). But notice something else, at least with the two women we mentioned, but surely even in the case of the Pharisees who Jesus chastizes. What He wants most is that they turn from the wickedness and back to Him the Bridegroom of bridegrooms. He loves His bride, the Church, enough that He dies for her. Not in some cheesy Hollywood pickup line kinda way. It's actual love! He actually does it! All that His Church, that you and I, might be washed in the cleansing flood of His holy precious blood. That sinners though we are, we might be holy and blameless, that we would be saints as we stand before our God in glory for all eternity with stain or wrinkle or any other blemish.

Brothers and Sisters, to our God purity is important. Because it is, He protects it in the Sixth Commandment and bids us live lives that display it for the world to see. Because we struggle to live up to it, He once again provides purity for us in the person of His Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ who lives in perfect purity, dies on the cross for every sin, and rises that we might be assured of His love and forgiveness. As He shows His love for us, He provides us with every reason to *fear and love God that we lead a pure and decent life in words and actions, and that husband and wife love and honor each other.* Amen.