

Greetings to you! Our theme for this morning's meditation is, "Our hearts must be kept free from anger and hatred." The passage that was read from Matthew's gospel this morning is another section of the Sermon on the Mount. One of the key things that Jesus teaches his disciples and us is the need for inward purity and not just outward show. Since Matthew's gospel is primarily addressed to the Jews we see Jesus saying in 5:17, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them." What does Jesus mean by saying that he has come to fulfil them? Jesus did not come to replace the old law with a new one which transcends it; to replace the law with the spirit of love; to confirm the validity of the law; to live out the requirements of the law; to empower others to live out the laws demands or to fulfil the prophetic content of the Law or Prophets. Fulfil must be understood primarily on what Jesus offers as a teacher. Jesus was not undercutting the role of the Law and the Prophets but was challenging them to understand and to live out what the law actually meant.

Jesus then tells his disciples that unless their righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, they would certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. The Pharisees and the teachers of the law were extremely good in tithing, ritual purity and Sabbath observances and committed themselves to a set of shared views as to how these should be best lived out. The problem with the Pharisees is that they forgot the very purpose of the law. They majored on minors and minored on majors. Sometimes we too as a church can be so caught up with a minutiae of the rituals that we forget the very purpose for which we gathered to worship. Our hearts are filled with anger and hatred against those who do not conform to our traditions and expectations. Jesus warns us against such attitudes.

Jesus tells them that they had heard, "You shall not murder"; "whoever murders will be liable to judgement." But I tell you that anyone who is angry with their brothers or sisters will be subject to judgement. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, "Raca," is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, "You fool!" will be in danger of the fire of hell. When Jesus says, "You have heard he is referring to the Ten Commandments (Deuteronomy 5:22)." However, Jesus says that anyone who is angry with his brother or sister is equally guilty as that of a murderer. The point that Jesus is making is that this anger will eventually find its expression in murder. The fate of the angry person is deliberately expressed in exactly the same words as that used for the fate of the murderer in verse 21. Jesus also says that if anyone calls a brother or sister 'Raca' which in Aramaic means 'empty' it is equivalent to calling a person 'Moron' in English. Jesus says that such people will be answerable to the court and also if we call a brother or a sister as a fool then we will be under judgement. In all these three examples we note that Jesus is pushing his disciples to go to the heart of the matter, which is a matter of the heart. Jeremiah cries out, "The heart is a deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand?" Jesus is telling us very clearly that anger and hatred against our brothers and sisters will endanger us of facing judgement.

Jesus then tells his disciples that if we remember that a brother or a sister has something against us and we are about to offer a gift to the altar, then we are to leave that gift there and go and seek reconciliation before we offer that gift. Once we have been reconciled we can offer that gift. Jesus challenges us to settle matters quickly so that it doesn't go to the court and we are put in prison.

The point that Jesus makes in this section is that our hearts must be kept free from anger and hatred, Jesus calls for internal purity and holiness rather than external show. May we truly be filled with God's love that we would be set free from anger and hatred towards our brothers and sisters.