

“You Have Heard It Said”

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Matthew 5.21-37
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Every time we raise our voice to sing a song to our Father, we express our desire to have a close relationship with Him, it is also an affirmation of His magnificence and, also, the meaning we give to the songs is related to our personal experiences and our journey of faith.

In order to better understand Scripture, it is necessary to learn to connect our daily lives with the teachings of Jesus' preaching.

In fact, that is what Matthew does in his gospel, interpreting the Scriptures and Jesus' message about the Kingdom, in light of the daily life of the first century community. For us who are in the 21st century, even though the Circumstances may be different, the diversity of our society, the division as a consequence of ideas, the lack of ethics and the lack of impulse control, continue to be characteristics that both societies share. Which leads us to think about how we can interpret this passage in light of our context and the challenges of our times.

The truth is that there are issues that we prefer not to talk about, there are social expectations that are not comfortable for us and, in addition, we carry stereotypes and prejudices that have been implemented. Therefore, when Jesus begins these teachings by saying: "You have heard that it was said to the ancients," it seems to me that he is inviting us to consider what we or our people take for granted regarding our beliefs and practices (social and religious).

What is more, as the Epiphany season closes and we prepare for the beginning of Lent, this preamble of Jesus at this point in the Sermon on the Mount is an invitation to evaluate, and even to question, what we think "It is as it is, because yes." This is one of the places in the gospels that questions the “because the Bible says so” argument.

Speaking of those essential things that make up the kingdom of heaven, Jesus first identifies those who are protagonists of the work of the kingdom (5:1-12) and then explains that the people gathered to listen to his sermon would from that moment participate and actors in the work of that kingdom (5:13-20).

In verse 21, Jesus begins what appears to be a series of questioning of his audience's expectations of ordinary events in that (and perhaps our) context – anger, lust, divorce, and perjury.

Jesus does not seek to give easy or quick answers. He seems to intentionally avoid clichés. Faced with social norms (both cultural and religious), Jesus calls for an ethical life based on intentional and sincere relationships, and not on what is said to be what is good or what is correct. Jesus seems to put it simply, though certainly not simply.

The problem is not only that we don't have to kill; this is well known. The problem is that being in a fight with your neighbor adversely affects even the genuineness of our worship. The question of adultery is much more complex than mere physical actions; it is a matter of the body, feelings, and self-control. The issue of divorce in antiquity and today is extremely complicated, and on many occasions what is in question is much more than power games, gender role expectations, and religious pressures. Regarding the matter of oaths, Jesus seems to wonder what is the need for them. If we live an ethical life, saying yes and no should be enough. TRUE?

That is part of the question. What other regulations, expectations and even social, political and religious clichés exist in our communities that require an ethical and relational challenge? In preparation for the season of Lent, what aspects of our life together – as congregations and/or as communities – require a self-examination that is influenced by the fundamentals of the kingdom of heaven brought to us by Jesus?

The outline in Matthew 5:21ff is as follows:

- They heard that it was said (the voice of yesterday)
- I tell you (that voice heard today)

- Therefore... (that voice made practical in today's world)

What Jesus is doing right now is listening to his ancestors. To understand them and then give them meaning in their own context and in his own time.

So Jesus here is not eliminating the law and the prophets, but he is putting them in conversation with his present tense.

You can have a memory of the teachings we have received from our ancestors. We can put these teachings in a social and cultural context.

We can also rethink these teachings. In the manner of "We heard that we were told... but now we say..."

Our new contexts and situations can undoubtedly make us review what we have heard. In the same way, we are also called to reread the biblical texts that our ancestors read, receive their interpretations and reread them.

What are the interpretative frameworks that today we consider necessary and inalienable? Surely we will think, for example, of respect for diversity, justice and care for creation when we listen again to what we were told.

The call is to follow the spirit of the law. Not the superficial but living the law of God in its best sense, in its deepest meaning. It is not a to-do list. It is a call to be transformed. It is a call to follow a new path of life. It is a way of life that promotes peace. It is walking in the light. It is to put your hand in the hand of the Lord Jesus and go with him.