

"How to Not Kill Anyone"

Series: This is where the healing begins, part 2

Matthew 5: 21-26, 43-48

Welcome again this morning to God's house. This is a place where we expect to hear God's voice, a place where we will experience grace and forgiveness, and a place where we want to be challenged and grow. We all know that growth and change is uncomfortable, but ultimately it is a part of life, and it is worth it.

It's good to be surrounded by so many people who are willing to serve and pray. Would you please pray with me?

"Lord, we come before us this morning confessing all of our brokenness and our deep need to experience your healing. We ask that you grant us your Spirit that we may live in peace with our neighbors. Allow your words to sink deep into our hearts and show us how to love our enemies. We pray this in Jesus name. Amen."

So, I have a pop quiz for you this morning. You've heard of the Ten Commandments? Good. What is the sixth commandment? I'll give you a hint: check the sermon title. Or, if your bible is handy, look up Exodus, chapter 20. The answer is "Do not murder."

Now I have my own confession this morning: I have never literally killed anybody. It's probably obvious that I'm not good with knives anyway. But I also want to point out something else: I have never met a convicted murderer or even visited a maximum security prison. So I could easily sit back and think, I got it made. I must be perfect. I'm not like them.

Many of us might have a callous attitude toward murderers. David Kinnaman, in his book, Unchristian, has found that multiple surveys reveal that one of the most common words people use to describe Christians is “judgmental.” Truth is, we have deserved that label. In many ways, we have been caught up in legalism and moralism. Ask any basketball player, and they will tell you: there is no such thing as a moral victory. We don’t need moralism in the church, we need grace.

Our words don’t always match our actions. As Christ followers, we are trying our best to live up to his example, but we fail, a lot. We are rightly accused of being judgmental. Have you ever heard someone use the excuse, “I’m better than a murderer, therefore, God must let me into heaven.” Last I checked, two great heroes of the faith, Moses and Paul, were both murderers. And I certainly don’t think that I’m better than they are. Romans 12:3 says not to think of ourselves more highly than we should. Comparison is not the name of the game. Grace is.

Do you hear what I’m saying this morning? Instead of playing the comparison game, let’s go back and examine Jesus’ words more closely. Fortunately for us, Jesus has a way of confronting our deepest assumptions. He can take what we thought we know and turn it completely upside down. That’s grace.

I have a simple rule I want to lay down this morning, something that should be easy to remember. Are you ready? Here it is: Don’t kill anybody. Can we all agree this is a good thing? Excellent. Because I have news for you this morning: we are all murderers.

Look at the very first verse in our scripture this morning. Jesus said, “You’re familiar with the command to the ancients, ‘Do not murder.’ I’m telling you that

anyone who is so much as angry with a brother or sister is guilty of murder.”

(Matthew 5:21, Message.)

We joke around the house that if the kids weren't so cute, they'd be dead. Why? Because we get really mad at them sometimes when they disobey. And we say things we regret, and then have to go back and apologize and seek forgiveness.

Think about your own words, your own attitudes for a moment. Ever flown off the handle? Ever thought, I can never talk to that person again, never help them again? We all have. Guess what? By Jesus' standards, that makes us all cold-blooded killers.

This is why Jesus' teaching is so confounding. It's natural to hold grudges. It's natural to be angry. Jesus knows that this is the source of murder. So he gets around the legalism, and he cuts to the heart.

Stop for a second and ask yourself, what is the purpose of the Old Testament law? Why do we have the Ten Commandments? Christianity is not a bunch of rules to follow, not a checklist. These laws or commandments are there to show us that we can NEVER be perfect. They show us what perfection is, hold a mirror up to our hearts, and show us how short we fall. The law is there to show us that we need grace.

Jesus goes on to say, we kill each other by our careless words. If we are mad enough to allow Satan to plant thoughts of revenge and bitterness in our minds, we sin. In one translation of this passage, Jesus uses the word “Raca,” R-A-C-A, an Arabic word for “airhead”. The Message uses the words “stupid” and “idiot”. Why do we say that stuff? Why do we think that stuff? Because we

judge ourselves by our own intentions, yet we judge others by their actions. And Jesus points out that this is not how to love others.

Reconciliation is our number one priority. “If you enter your place of worship and, about to make an offering, you suddenly remember a grudge a friend has against you, abandon your offering, leave immediately, go to this friend and make things right. Then and only then, come back and work things out with God.” (Matthew 5:23-24, The Message.) Notice the words. Not “if we have a problem against someone.” If they have something against you, you need to confess, you need to humble yourself and go do it, immediately. I promise you, if anyone ever gets up from the pew during a sermon and says, “I’ve got to call my brother,” I’ll lend you my phone to make that call.

We have to realize how serious unchecked anger is. We need to stop murdering people in our minds. We need to stop demanding our own vindication. We need to start realizing that everyone is broken.

Jesus says to settle, even on the way to court. We must do everything possible to be reconciled, even if it seems impossible. I know that these are hard words. This is a challenge. But is true. You cannot read this passage and wiggle out of it. Jesus is saying this is what it means to follow him.

OK, so maybe this challenge is possible if you have a relationship with your brother, sister, or friend. But what if this person is unknown, a stranger, even an enemy?

Do we have some enemies right now? (*Ask.*) How about the ISIS? How about those who attack our addiction to security? Drug dealers? Child molesters? Terrorists? Who have we called our enemies simply because our morals differ, or our political beliefs differ, or our faith is different?

I know you already know this but I want to hear you say this out loud. What does Jesus say we should do for our enemies? Love them and pray for them. Look at verse 44 (NIV). “I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” Think about that list of enemies we just named. Do we pray for them?

Sure, it’s easy to pray for and love those who pray for and love you. But if that’s as far as you go, you are not following Christ. Jesus did not say following him was easy. Following Christ is hard. Challenging. It means giving up my sense of entitlement, my thirst for revenge. People should come to a church and not see us drawing lines, making it “Us versus Them,” labeling, name calling, or being judgmental. When these attitudes are in our hearts, Jesus says, they are equivalent to murder. We just said, the rule is, “Don’t kill anybody!”

If God created us with emotions and desires, why is this so hard to overcome? It really comes down to pride. We judge ourselves by our intentions and others by their actions, instead of admitting everyone is broken. Sin is in the world. We cannot overcome it alone. We cannot earn our way into the kingdom of God. One only comes by surrendering. That’s hard.

To be a child of God who inherits the kingdom – to be a princess or a prince of the heavenly king – we have to realize what God has done for us. God does not play favorites. The sun shines on all, evil and good; the rain falls on the righteous and unrighteous. (Matt 5:45) If God does not withhold from any of God’s children, why would we? If we refuse to pray for our enemies, we are withholding the spiritual rain and sunshine from them. And then we can’t be known by our love, because we’ve made our love conditional.

How do we not kill anyone? Realize that if God applied the same standard to us that we apply to others, we'd all be dead. If I expected my children to “be perfect or else!” they'd be dead. And I would be extremely unhappy, too.

Jesus tells us, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly father is perfect.” (Matthew 5:48, NIV.) Not, “never make a mistake.” That's not possible. What this means is, be perfect in love. Loves as God loves. Forgive as God forgives. Let go of your sense of entitlement. None of us deserve what we get. That's grace.

Eugene Peterson says it well in his paraphrase, *The Message* (verse 48) “In a word, what I'm saying is, *Grow up*. You're kingdom subjects. Now live like it. Live out your God-created identity. Live generously and graciously toward others, the way God lives toward you.”

Do you know how the bible describes us? In Luke 14, there is a story of the great banquet. It represents the church. The guests are poor, beggars, outcast. That's us. We are all poor, beggars, the outcasts who need grace. The world is watching to see if we will be any different than what they've come to expect: arrogant, looking down our noses at outsiders, treating them like murders and thugs because they don't fit our expectations.

Don't kill anyone before they've had a chance to experience grace. If the world sees us loving our enemies and praying for them, that will be a greater testimony than any song, any offering, any words of praise, any story we would ever speak.

Don't kill anybody. Imagine how different the world would be if everyone agreed to this simple rule.

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm 139:23-24 NRSV.)

Congregational Response: The World Methodist Social Affirmation, UMH #886

Memory verse:

Matthew 5:44: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."

Reflection Questions:

1. What are some things people do that make you angry? How do you usually respond?
2. What's the hardest thing about loving your enemies and praying for them?
3. Why is Jesus' teaching so different from conventional wisdom?
4. How does experiencing forgiveness in Christ empower us to reconcile with others?