

**7th Sunday after Epiphany**  
**Matthew 5:38-48**  
**Hymns: 355, 431, 356, 357, 285, 454.**

**Introit: Psalm 119 : 33-40.**

P Teach me, O LORD, the way of Your Prescriptions,  
C **that I may keep it to the end!**  
P Give me understanding, that I may observe Your Instruction,  
C **and that I may keep it with my whole heart!**  
P Lead me on the path of Your Commandments!  
C **For I have been taking pleasure in it.**  
P Turn my heart toward Your Testimonies  
C **and not toward dishonest gain!**  
P Turn my eyes away from looking at worthless things!  
C **Preserve my life through Your Ways!**  
P Confirm Your Word to Your servant,  
C **so that I may fear You!**  
P Take away my disgrace, of which I have been afraid!  
C **For Your Decisions are good.**  
P Look! I have been longing for Your Directions.  
All **Preserve my life through Your righteousness!**

**Collect:** O God, the strength of all who put their trust in You, mercifully grant that by Your power we may be defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C **Amen.**

**Old Testament: Leviticus 19:1-2,9-18**  
**Epistle: 1 Corinthians 3:10-23**  
**Gospel: Matthew 5:38-48**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.  
Amen.

The text for our sermon this morning is written in the book of Matthew 5: 38-48, which was our Gospel reading before.

**38** “You have heard that it was said: ‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’ **39** However, I tell you, do not resist an evil person! Rather, if anyone slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other one to him also! **40** If someone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat as well! **41** If anyone forces you to go two kilometres, go four kilometres with him! **42** Give to the person who asks you for something, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you!

**43** “You have heard that it was said: ‘You shall love your neighbour, and you shall hate your enemy!’ **44** However, I tell you, love your enemies, and pray for those who are persecuting you, **45** that you may be the children of your Father in heaven! For He makes His sun rise on evil people and on good people, and sends rain on righteous people and unrighteous people. **46** For, if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax-collectors do the same? **47** If you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others are? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? **48** Therefore you shall be perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect!

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,  
Peace be with you.

In the Old Testament reading we heard the second most important commandment. You may remember the incident of Jesus answering the question about the greatest commandment. **"One of the scribes came to Him. When he heard them arguing, and saw that Jesus had been answering them well, he asked Him, "Which Commandment is the first of them all?" - Jesus answered, "The first one is: 'Hear, Israel, the Lord, our God, the Lord is one, and you shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength!' - The second one is this: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself!' There is no other Commandment greater than these."**

[Mark 12:28-31.] - Today's Gospel is a continuation of the readings from the Sermon on the Mount. In this part of the sermon Jesus continued to unpack the law. He preached some of the harder parts of what it means to love your neighbour as you love yourself.

Jesus' teaching in today's Gospel is very relevant to us today. - It provides a diagnosis of why there is so much conflict in today's culture and in today's churches.

I wonder if any of you can remember back in the 80's almost every Christian book shop had wooden bead necklaces with little phrases on them like WWJD, "What would Jesus do?" GIG, "God is Great," and the like. There was one particular one that I remember it was simply, "JOY!" And the little card on the necklace said that J stands for Jesus, O stands for others, and Y stands for yourself. I imagine this little acronym has been around almost since Christianity came to the English speaking world.

The J stands for Jesus and Jesus is God and to love Jesus with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength is to love God and keep the greatest commandment. O stands for others and the others in your life are your neighbours and to love others is to keep the second commandment about loving your neighbour as you love yourself. Y, the last letter, stands for yourself. Last of all, you love yourself. Jesus first, others second, yourself last ... J - O - Y ... JOY. - How much conflict in our lives would go away if we all could follow this simple little acronym? What would life be like in our congregation if we gave first place to what Jesus wants as He gives it to us in His Word, the Bible ... if we gave second place to what the other person wanted, even if we didn't like it ... and finally, if we made our wants to be the very last of all?

In today's Gospel, Jesus speaks of the O in JOY ... the others. What does it mean to love your neighbour as you love yourself? If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. - If anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. - If anyone forces you to go two kilometres, go four kilometres. Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you. Jesus is very clear. You love your neighbour by placing his wants above your wants.

How does this compare to our society today? What do we hear? I've got my rights. I have the right to my opinion. It bothers me. I don't like it. I don't feel heard. I've got to watch out for number one. What does it say, that we all know that the phrase number one means - the person is talking about himself

Let's be honest. - We don't do JOY - Jesus Others Yourself. We do YOJ - Yourself Others Jesus. We love ourselves the most. We love others if there is something in it for us. We don't really give Jesus that much thought at all. - What does it say when we want what we want and we really don't care to study the

Bible to find out what Jesus wants? - What does it say when we are not willing to politely listen to another person's point of view, but throw temper tantrums like little children when we don't get our way?

As if it isn't hard enough to follow JOY with people who are friendly, Jesus goes on to extend the idea of neighbour to our enemies. - Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. - Jesus tells us to love our enemies. - What kind of love is Jesus talking about? He is talking about ἀγάπη, that kind of love that sacrifices itself for others. - How are we doing with that? Can we truly say that we make sacrifices for our enemies?

Then, as if that wasn't enough, Jesus tells us to compare ourselves to God the Father. - God the Father sends His rain on the just and the unjust. As Luther states in the explanation of the Fourth Petition of the Lord's Prayer, "God certainly gives daily bread to everyone without our prayers, even to all evil people ...". So Jesus asks us to follow the example of God the Father who blesses all people alike with the gifts of His creation. Finally, Jesus puts the final nail in the coffin of our self-righteousness with these words: **"Therefore you shall be perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect!"**

So, are we as perfect as our Father in Heaven? Do we put Jesus first in our lives? - Do we put others next? Do we put ourselves last? Do we make decisions by checking the Bible first to see what Jesus says about it, checking to see what is best for our neighbour, including our enemies, next, and checking our own interests last?

It's not me that's saying this, read the Gospel. - This is Jesus. - Do these words from Jesus make you squirm and feel a little uncomfortable? - If they don't, **then you are deceiving yourself and the truth is not in you.** [1 John 1:8.] - If they do, then realize that this is Jesus' teaching the LAW, and the Law is supposed to make you squirm. The primary purpose of the law is to show us our sin and our need for a Saviour.

There is one and only one thing that can give us comfort when Jesus hammers us with the law like this. These high standards that Jesus sets for us are also for Him. - When Jesus took on His humanity in the womb of the Virgin, He placed Himself under the authority of the law. While we can never live up to this high standard, Jesus lived up to this standard in every way. He totally submitted to the will of God the Father. He constantly thought of others before He thought of Himself.

Even when Jesus was scolding His enemies, He loved them and He warned them of the dangers of their false teachings. - We might think that telling people off means that we don't love them! - But think about this question: how much do you have to hate someone in order to see them on the wide road that leads to eternal punishment and not warn them about it? - Jesus loved His enemies by warning them of the eternal danger of their false beliefs. - He loved them by warning them of the wrath to come.

Jesus lived the life of perfection that He spoke of in today's Gospel. - He kept the law even as He preached it in today's Gospel. Jesus was obedient to God the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane. He prayed, **"My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass away from Me! Nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will!"** [Matthew 26:30.] - Ultimately, Jesus suffered and went to the cross in accordance to the will of God the Father. **He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.** [Philippians 2:8.] - He is perfect even as God the Father is perfect.

Jesus' passion is also the ultimate expression of His love for us. - As the Holy Spirit inspired the Apostle Paul to write, **However, God shows His own love for us by this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.** [Romans 5:8.] - While He was on the cross, He prayed for the people who crucified Him: **"Father, forgive them! For they do not know what they are doing."** [Luke 23:34.] - While He was on the cross, He promised salvation to those who were crucified with Him: **"Truly, I tell you, today you will be with Me in paradise."** [Luke 23:43.] - While He was on the cross, He was thinking about us. He was taking on the

punishment that we deserved for our sin. He was thinking about giving us the righteousness that He earned with His holy life. - He was thinking about our eternal salvation.

Although we fail miserably at keeping the law that Jesus preached in today's Gospel, we still have eternal life. - We have it not because of anything we do, but because of the holy, precious blood, and the innocent suffering and death of the one who preached such stern law. - He fulfilled the law for us and took its severe punishment onto Himself.

We have the ultimate sign that Jesus did all things well. Although He defeated sin, death, and the power of the devil with His death, He did not remain dead. Instead, He bodily rose from the dead and ascended to the Father.- In His resurrection, we have the promise of eternal life.

In today's Gospel, Jesus taught us that we are to place God first in all things, then we are to love our neighbour even if our neighbour is our enemy. Finally, we should think of ourselves last of all. We fail this teaching miserably every day. - Nevertheless, God the Father declares that we have kept this teaching for Jesus' sake. Because Jesus kept this teaching perfectly and took our punishment to Himself, we receive the benefit of His perfect life. - We receive eternal salvation in Him. - Our entire salvation rests in Jesus Christ and nowhere else. Amen

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. **Amen**

**3rd Hymn: 356,**

### **Prayer of the Church 7th Sunday after the Epiphany 2017**

P Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

*Brief silence*

P Lord God, heavenly Father, You are building a living temple for Your Holy Spirit out of the Church, whose cornerstone is Jesus Christ, Your Son.- Grant faithful Pastors to lay upon this foundation of Your Word that will survive until the day of His return. Never let us trust or boast in our own works, but only in the work You do by Your Spirit through Your Son. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

P When there are divisions in the Church on earth, let what is genuine be recognized, that we may always walk the path of Your commandments and so please You. Guide us to a reliance on Your Son, the One who perfectly loved and obeyed Your Law for us all. Give us the Faith we need to follow in His way. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

P Almighty Father, You ask us to pray for our enemies and do good to those who hate us. - Help us in this, that all may humbly come before You, confess their sins and be reconciled to You and to each other. - Let no one be after selfish gain, but rather help us to consider others more significant than ourselves. - Do not let us hate our brother in our heart, but instead follow the humility of Your Son and make peace with our neighbour. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

Gracious Lord, You do not willingly afflict or grieve Your children. Look with compassion on those who are suffering in body or mind [*especially this week we ask for* \_\_\_\_\_]. Remember

them in Your mercy, strengthen them in patience, comfort them with the memory of Your goodness and let Your face shine on them, that they may be guarded by Your peace in Jesus Christ. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

P Heavenly Father, You have clothed us with Christ and His righteousness in Holy Baptism, and now You give us His body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins. Grant to all who receive Your Holy Supper this

day humble hearts that acknowledge their sin and rejoice in Your undeserved grace. Lord, in Your mercy,  
**C hear our prayer.**

**P** Lord God, by Your Word give us understanding to keep Your Law and observe it with our whole heart. By Your Son's body and blood, confirm to Your servants Your promise, that You may be feared, our reproach turned away and life granted us in Your righteousness. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Into Your hands, dear Father, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy, through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**Amen.**

**4th Hymn: 357,**