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Our Saviour Lutheran Church  
Epiphany 5  
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Sisters and brothers in Christ, let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. AMEN.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, I have to admit...

Yes, I must confess, that the Law fascinates me.

Although I have never wanted to be lawyer myself, I am fascinated by those who give their lives to studying the law, practicing the law, and writing about the law.

I am fascinated by all the statutes organizing and guiding society.

I am fascinated by the various cases and judgments that have come down over the decades, which then define our lives and become precedent for court decisions.

And I am fascinated by libraries, libraries that are just filled with volumes upon volumes of books devoted solely to the topic of law.

All this is fascinating to me, and yet I have never once entertained the idea of becoming a lawyer.

But, in truth, I guess you could say that I am a lawyer by default.

I guess you could say that each and every one of us, as a Christian believer, is a lawyer by default.

Why? Why are we lawyers?

Well, because of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

For Jesus tells us in our gospel reading today, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets, I have not come to abolish, but to fulfill."

"I have come to fulfill the law."

Indeed, Jesus says, "Until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter will pass from the law until all is accomplished."

Furthermore, Jesus says to his followers, “Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees...” (two groups steeped in the law)

“Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

So Jesus is the preeminent lawyer.

He is the paramount lawyer.

He came to fulfill the law, fulfill it down to every letter of the law, fulfill it to every stroke of the letter, down to every letter, down to every stroke of every letter in all those volumes of law contained in those law libraries.

And how, pray tell, did Jesus plan to accomplish that, do you suppose?

How does Jesus fulfill the law perfectly, completely, absolutely?

By one simple word, LOVE.

This, THIS is what Jesus is getting at in our gospel reading today.

To fulfill the law is to live by LOVE.

And this then is why Jesus is giving this exposition on the law today on a mountain.

This gospel reading is part of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount.

And the gospel writer Matthew describes Jesus here on a mountain talking about the law, to make us think of that other great biblical personality who talked about the law, who presented God’s law, namely Moses.

Moses had gone up on Mount Sinai to retrieve the Ten Commandments from God.

And now Jesus is on a mountain here in our gospel reading also, so in effect, Jesus is the new Moses, expounding on the law.

And Jesus tells us that he has come to fulfill the law, fulfill the law by love.

PAUSE

And, I suppose that if Jesus was suddenly transported to our present day...

...and if Jesus were to enroll in law school and so then begin studying the law, so as to become a lawyer in contemporary society...

...given Jesus' understanding of how to fulfill the law by love...

...yes, I suppose Jesus, sitting there in law school, would be a terrible burr in the side of his professors.

I mean, can you see it now?

Jesus is sitting in class at Yale Law School or Harvard Law School...

Can you see Jesus is sitting there in the lecture hall surrounded by other would-be lawyers, and one of his professors is up front going on about the law...

And the professor then suddenly asks a question of the students.

And Jesus' hand shoots up in the air to answer.

And the professor says, "Yes, you there, in the toga-like outfit with the long hair, with the seeming glow about his person. What is the answer?"

And Jesus replies, "The answer is love."

PAUSE

Regardless of whatever might be the question the professor asks, Jesus just pipes up and answers, "Love."

And perhaps in another class, a second law professor is lecturing, and she too stops to ask a question.

And again, Jesus' hand shoots up, and Jesus is recognized by the professor, and again, Jesus answers, "Love."

Love, love, love.

That is the only answer Jesus gives, whenever he is asked a question, whatever the question might be.

Love, love, love.

This is what Jesus is getting at in our gospel reading today, when he says, "I have come not to abolish the law but to fulfill it, and fulfill it perfectly, completely, absolutely, down to the last letter, down to the last stroke of a letter."

PAUSE

Of course, Jesus is right, isn't he?

If one lives by the rule of love, the entire law is fulfilled.

The commandments say...

Thou shall not kill. Thou shall not commit adultery. Thou shall not steal. Thou shall not bear false witness. So on and so forth.

This is what the commandments tell us...

And if we live by the rule of love, we will in truth never break a single one of those commandments.

Because to be loving is not to harm to one's neighbor.

To be loving is to live an existence whereby we seek never to harm our neighbor, but in truth seek to do good by our neighbor.

In this way, we fulfill all that the law requires.

PAUSE

And this truth that love fulfills the law... this truth should give us pause.

It should indeed make us realize that Church then is a type of law school, and we are all lawyers by default.

Only the law we learn is a very simplistic kind of law.

It is the law of love.

And I have often wondered if the law school at Yale or Harvard, or anywhere else, actually teaches this concept—the law of love.

I have wondered if this is part of the curriculum.

If we are loving, we fulfill all that the law requires of us. I wonder if that is taught in law school.

PAUSE

But we do have to be practical, too, right?

I mean none of us is motivated by love all the time.

None of us is perfect like our Lord, such that we can fulfill the law down to the very letter, down to the very stroke of every letter.

And so we need law schools, we need lawyers, and we need the court system for justice.

That is just the reality of our world.

And Martin Luther called this the left-hand side of his Two-Kingdom Theory, the side necessary for good order and discipline in society.

We need the civil law for order and discipline, because the law of love does not reign supreme in everyday life.

But make no mistake about it, if we all were to live by the rule of love, the justice system in society would not be necessary.

PAUSE

Now the apostle Paul, who was trained as a Pharisee, and so was deeply steeped in Jewish law...

The apostle Paul understood this law of love all too well.

In 1 Corinthians 13, that Pauline text which is often used for weddings, gets at the heart of Paul's theology regarding the law.

In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul writes that if we speak in the tongues of mortal and of angels, but do not have love, we are a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

And if we have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if we have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, we are nothing.

And if we give away all our possessions, and if we hand over our very body so that we may boast, but do not have love, we gain nothing.

We often see this passage as speaking of romantic love.

Like I said, this passage is often recited at weddings.

But what Paul is actually doing here is redefining our personhood, and redefining society as a whole in light of the law of love.

For what he is saying is that if we say anything, or if we do anything, or act in any way in the world, without the motivation for our words and deeds and actions coming from love, then what we say or do is pointless, and means and accomplishes nothing.

Everything we do or say is to be done out of love. That is the law that drives the kingdom of God.

PAUSE

The Spaniard, Ramón Llull (“Yool”), one of the great minds during the time of medieval Europe, who was known as “Doctor Illuminatus”...

How would like that to be your title in life, “Doctor Illuminatus”?

Anyway, Llull (“Yool”) said it this way, “He who loves not, lives not.”

He or she who loves not, lives not.

If our actions, if our words, if our deeds, are not motivated by love, we are truly not living.

We are doing something else than living. We are just existing, taking up space, if you will.

PAUSE

Love is all that really matters.

For the law of love is what truly empowers society.

The law of love is what truly guides society.

The law of love is what truly transforms society, propelling it forward, advancing it towards the kingdom of heaven.

So, yes, what we do here in Church, in worship, in Sunday School...

What we do here on Sunday mornings should be understood as law school.

To be sure, Yale or Harvard, has nothing on this law school of God’s making.

We are all lawyers in training, when we come to church.

We come here and we are reminded of God's love in Jesus Christ.

We come here and we are reminded of God's forgiveness through the power of the cross.

We come here and we are reminded of God's mercy for all people.

We come here and we are reminded that as broken as we are, as beaten down as we are by sin, we are still loved, we are still embraced by God's grace in his Son Jesus Christ.

We are still loved.

And if we understand that message, if we can internalize that message that we are so abundantly loved by God, we can then hopefully embody that love in the world.

And so, yes, we come here to law school, and we are made into lawyers of a peculiar kind, and then out there in the world, we practice law, we practice the law of love, and in doing so, we advance society slowly but surely toward the kingdom of God.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

