

**A Christian is Faithful, 100%**

**February 12, 2017**

**Matthew 5:21-37**

Grace and peace to you from God Our Father and from the one who brings us life, Jesus Christ Our Lord, amen.

In today’s Gospel lesson Jesus goes from the sublime to the ridiculous. He goes from the practical to the outrageous. He goes from talk of offerings and reconciliation to plucking your eye out and maiming ourselves in order to avoid sin and get into heaven. Just how much of this message are we supposed to take seriously, Lord! The more I thought about this lesson during the week, the more I kept being drawn to the very last verse where Jesus says just let your yes be yes and your no be no. I think that’s the take home line for this week. Jesus wants to talk to us today about our core values and I believe the first and foremost value Jesus would say we need to hold near and dear is that of Integrity. In the Air Force we hold to three core values and they go like this: Integrity First, Service Before Self, and Excellence in All We Do. Integrity always comes first because without your word nothing else really matters…

There once was a wealthy businessman who was on his deathbed. His pastor came to visit and prayed for his parishioner to be healed. When the pastor was done, the businessman said, "Preacher, if God heals me, I'll give the church a million dollars." Miraculously, the businessman got better and within a few short days was out of the hospital. Several months later, the pastor bumped into him on the sidewalk and said, “You know, when you were in the hospital dying, you promised to give the church a million dollars if you got well. We have not received it as of yet.” The businessman replied, “Did I say that? I guess that goes to show how sick I really was!” No integrity…

Today as we get back with Jesus on the Sermon on the Mount, we get to see what Jesus has to say about integrity. In our Gospel lesson Jesus Says: Let your Yes be Yes, and your No, be No; anything beyond this comes from the evil one. Satan, is the evil one He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

I’ve got a quick demonstration for you this morning. Who would like this $20 bill? Then crumple it up, step on it, roll it around and then hold it up again and ask, Who still wants this $20 bill? The value remains no matter what the item looks like on the outside no matter how scarred, bruised or beaten, the value is still the same. That is integrity. A person of integrity is validated by their words and their deeds. They don’t just talk the talk, they walk the talk. Integrity is making our daily actions line up with our heart's core values.

Integrity provides us with security and confidence. Proverbs 10:9 says, “The man of integrity walks securely, but he who takes crooked paths will be found out.” We live in a society without moral absolutes, where anything goes. When people can choose what is right and wrong without having a standard, how do you decide which way to go?

A busload of politicians were headed to a convention, but because of highway construction, they had to take a detour down a rural road. The driver was having problems with the windy, country lane and lost control of the bus. It ran off the road and crashed into a tree in an old farmer's field. The old farmer was out in his field and went to investigate what had happened. He went back to his tractor, got a shovel, and buried all the politicians. Since the politicians never arrived at their destination, a state trooper was dispatched to locate them. He saw the wrecked bus in the field, and looked up the old farmer. The farmer informed the trooper that he had buried all of them. The trooper asked if they were all dead. The old farmer replied, “Well, some of them kept saying they weren't, but you know how them politicians lie!”

Throughout the Scriptures you will find the words: honesty, purity, truth, upright and complete, righteous, and the word integrity itself. Over a thousand times throughout both old and new testaments these words are talked about over and over. If we are going to live lives of integrity, we have got to know what integrity looks like. That comes from spending time in the Scriptures with God.

To the extent we apply the truths we read in the scriptures to our lives, that’s the extent we are living lives of integrity. This is most certainly true Luther might say, because the Bible is the only standard for living that is true and unchanging. My theology professor used to say scripture is the “Norm that norms all norms.” The bible is the standard you go to in order to determine if the standard you are living by is honorable and good. Walking in integrity means bringing all of what God's Word says into our daily activities. It means that I become a doer of the Word, that I don’t just talk the talk, but I also walk the talk every day.

Once there were two brothers who were very rich and very wicked. Both of them lived lives of sinfulness and debauchery and used their wealth to cover up a lot of their wickedness. Both were members of a local church and used their money to be in positions of influence. The old preacher at this church had retired and a new preacher had been hired. This preacher was a man who preached the gospel with zeal and courage and lived an exemplary life. The congregation began to grow at such a rapid rate that they needed to build a new church building. At this same time, one of the brothers got sick and died. The new preacher was asked to do the funeral. The day before the funeral service, the surviving brother pulled the preacher aside and handed him an envelope. He said, There is a check in this envelope that is large enough to pay off the new building. All I want you to do is tell all the people at the funeral tomorrow that my brother was a saint. Do you think you can handle that? The preacher shook the brother's hand and said, I will do exactly what you have asked. The preacher immediately took the check to the bank and deposited it to the church's account. The next day, the preacher stood in front of the large group of people who had come to the funeral and said, “This man in the coffin was an ungodly sinner and wicked to the core. He was unfaithful to his wife and abusive to his children. He was ruthless in business and a hypocrite in the church… But compared to his brother, he was a saint!”

Back in my Air Force days I used to take my uniforms to the dry cleaners. The slacks and jacket were dry clean only and the shirts and my BDUs well, I just took them because I liked the stiffness from the starch and I could never get that same feeling at home. Anyway, the place I used to take them to when we lived in San Antonio was called the One Hour Cleaner. One time we were having a special occasion called a dining In and I needed my mess dress uniform cleaned right away. When the clerk asked when I would like to pick the uniform up, I asked if I could return in an hour. She replied, I can't get this back to you until Friday, which was two days away. I questioned her about getting it back that same day and pointed to the name on their huge sign in the front that says One-Hour Cleansers. I said, “I thought you did dry cleaning in an hour?” “No,” she replied, “that's just the name of the store…”

In the Dr. Seuss, book Horton Hatches an Egg, an elephant, named Horton, promises to sit on an egg and hatch it for its mother, lazy Miss Mayzie. As the days and weeks go by, Horton just keeps sitting there on that nest up in a tree. All his friends encourage him to forget his promise and to come play with them. Every time he was tempted to leave that egg he said, “I meant what I said, I said what I meant. An elephant is faithful 100%.” What could God do with a believer with that had that type of a commitment? That type of integrity?

God promised the people a Savior, the Messiah. When Jesus came to fulfill that promise he came face to face with the cost of that promise. In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus prayed for the cup to pass him by. God did not grant that prayer request, but instead gave his son the will and the strength to live up to the promise and Jesus became the great promise keeper for all of us.

Jesus makes it clear in Matthew 5 that whenever we make a promise we do so in the presence of God. We can do terrible damage to our witness and even the cause of Christ when we are not people of our word. The World is looking for authenticity wherever they can find it. Our own integrity and the integrity of the Church demand nothing less than for us to be true to our word and even more so to be true to God’s Word. Today more than ever, we have to let our Yes be yes and our No be no.

May we be men and women of integrity. May Jesus be the Lord of every aspect of your life. May the Holy Spirit transform you into the image of Jesus. The image of the ultimate promise keeper. May we all be like Horton the elephant and say, I meant what I said, I said what I meant. A Christian is faithful, ...100%.