

Grace and peace are yours dear friends from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen

Today, our scripture readings focus, first on the giving of the Law, which is seen as a blessing by Israel, the abuse of the Law, and finally the understanding of the fulfillment of the Law.

Instead of starting at the beginning I would like to start with the end of the message because we are here today in the Year of Our Lord, Two Thousand Eighteen. The Law means something very different socially to the greater population of people across continents, nations, and cities. Laws are civil forms of authority that attempt to define what is right and wrong, what is punishable and what is acceptable, what is good and bad. Laws today are the moral standards we live by as mutually agreed upon by governments and her peoples.

Laws exist to maintain safe and healthy societies of people where 'Life-Together' can be shared and experienced in a way that leads to growth, prosperity, and eventually peace. But for all our efforts, all our controls, all our freedoms and limitations, there is still an element of decay in our world that attacks the very best of our intentions. Crime still occurs, people continued to get hurt, laws are still being broken and peace is still a far distant dream.

For that matter my friends, as our world collectively advances, while we have put a man in the moon and dream of traveling to Mars, the poor get poorer, the starving get hungrier, the homeless get lower, the tired get wearier while at the same time the strong continue to build up defenses and those with advantage view their position as a means of personal survival.

For every step we take forward, at times in our history it looks like we are going two, three or four steps backwards with regard to the basic respect for human care, compassion, and comfort. People were starving while Christ walked the earth...why of all the elements in our society is that still an issue? We don't need technology to extend compassion or any other action of the heart my friends. And this...is what Jesus is saying to us in the gospel text.

The story begins with God giving the Law to Israel to reflect how He expects them to act towards one another and how to act towards HIM! The lesson, the meaning of this Law my friends is to show our love to God by the way we love and care for one another. At the time the Law was given to Israel, the gift and blessing was also limited to Israel. Through Israel, the blessing bestowed upon them becomes of blessing to the entire world through the gift of Jesus Christ and the forgiveness of sins for ALL PEOPLE, not the few, not the selected, not the advantaged.

The story continues with God giving His Holy Spirit to you and me so our hearts will contain the strength and love to do what we could never do before: to love one another in a way that reflects our true and complete love for God! This is what the Law is about; it was always a matter of heart with love at the center of all thoughts, words, and actions.

So what about the evil intentions that remain? The fornication, theft, murder, adultery, and the other sins mentioned by Jesus that defile a person? My friends, what about the horrible

sin of neglect, abuse, and harm we do when we simply chose NOT to act? This is a reflection that we are still in a world where SIN still resides and a world where people still make a choice with regard to whom they will serve.

When we look at the news each night, read the headlines, they rarely sing the praises of God, but rather reveal the deadly effects of sin in the world. The deceit, the decay, and the constant dirt that continues to be tossed at people hides the Holy Spirit that is at the heart of God's people. Sin would prefer that we dress in the black sackcloth instead of the pure white baptismal robes that Christ alone died for so we might not only wear, but recognize our brothers, sisters, neighbors, strangers, and friends all wearing too!

As people of God with the faith to believe, we can see the world the way God has created it to be while others without faith come to know the love of God through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. No tricks, no hidden wires or mirrors; just the pure and holy truth that God has entered into our hearts and minds to purify what had become corrupt.

You see my friends, we willingly invited sin into our lives, we willingly disobeyed, and we willingly broke the Law. Even when in all our grand and proud accomplishment, there is still fault within us because we are human and because we are born into a world of sin. But Jesus fulfilled the Law that condemned us and freed us from the penalty of sin. We have been given more than a second chance my friends; WE have been given NEW LIFE.

We have been given life that does not defile our brothers, sisters, neighbors, and strangers because the very life within us is the eternal life we will share will all people for all time. The new life within you and me is the life to heal, feed, care, and most compassionately tend to a world that is cold, hungry, and lonely.

How ironic... We cannot steal from someone who has nothing. Likewise, we cannot envy the destitute, and we cannot desire for sick, ill, and suffering. And still there is something we can still take from these people. From the homeless who have nothing to take; who will take their loneliness in exchange for compassion? Who will demand from the suffering their tears in exchange for comfort? Who will trick a person out of their fears and offer peace and rest?

Well, Jesus came to live among us and requested all the DEAD; then through His blood He gave us new life and a restored relationship with our Heavenly Father. With new life, God is able to share with the world the life, light, and eternal hope for all people regardless of their present faith or understanding. God uses us (and the new life we have been given) to reveal to all people and to our God the pure undefiled love that is at the very heart of our thoughts, words, and deeds.

The Law that is given is a Law that cannot be obeyed without the strength, support, and protection of God alone; a gift that is now given to humankind as the Holy Spirit continues to keep us holy and pure as we travel towards our destination and the peace that passes all understanding to keep our hearts and minds through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.