

Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections based on this week's lectionary readings

February 16, 2014
Fifth Sunday after Epiphany, Year A

The readings this week:

- Deuteronomy 30:15-20 ◦ Psalm 119:1-8
- 1 Corinthians 3:1-9 ◦ Matthew 5:21-37

[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

Crimes of the Heart

Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not murder'; and 'whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, 'You fool,' you will be liable to the hell of fire. So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.



We just finished celebrating Valentine's Day in the U.S. Children all over the country wrote cute notes on construction paper hearts and handed them to their friends at school.

If only love were that simple.

Matthew moves us quickly from the nice sayings of Jesus ("blessed are the poor in spirit," "you are the salt of the earth") to the hard ones ("if you say 'you fool' you will be liable to the hell of fire," "you will never get out until you have paid the last penny"). Ouch. I liked the nice Jesus better.

It's so much simpler to believe, "Hey, I'm a pretty good person. I mean, it's not as though I ever *killed* anybody." As a *CSI* fan, I agree that not having killed anybody is a pretty good thing. So did Jesus' hearers. But honestly, for most people, "don't commit murder" is a pretty low bar. I like low bars. The high bars, not so much. They require me to pay attention to my hurtful words, and even my hateful anger. Stuff nobody else can see. Well, nobody except God.

This close to Valentine's Day, Jesus chooses to meddle all the way from murder, to what is going on in our hearts. I don't think he really is saying that over-the-top anger and nasty words are just as bad as murder, but rather that the commandment not to kill really means that we honor life in other people. We honor it in such a way that both they and we live more fully.

Jesus' law of love draws us into a deeper understanding of our own hearts, and a deeper appreciation of how the other person occupies space in the heart of God.

Happy Valentine's Day.

Melissa Bane Sevier, [Contemplative Viewfinder](#)

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Reflecting on the Word



1st Reading: [Deuteronomy 30:15-20](#)

Compare and contrast the choice between life and death (vv. 11-20). What is involved in each? Read the passage again. What issues of the heart are woven throughout? The curses and the blessings for obedience were aimed at cultivating a community of people with spiritually responsive hearts. How would you characterize the spiritual responsiveness of your own heart? In what area of your life do you need the reassurance of verses 11-14, that you are able to follow God's commands? [Quiet Time Bible Study, InterVarsity Press](#)

Psalm Reading: [Psalm 119:1-8](#)

What different words does the psalmist use to describe God's Word? What benefits of knowing and following God's Word does the psalmist mention in verses 1-8? What is a way you have experienced frustration in studying Scripture? What in the psalmist's example can bring encouragement to us to meditate on and delight in God's Word? [Quiet Time Bible Study, InterVarsity Press](#)

Corinthians, Paul and the Seahawks?

What does it take to be successful in the world of team sports? Contrary to popular opinion, it is not tattoos, jail time, and steroids. It is teamwork! The greatest athletes in the world are only considered successful in the ultimate sense when they win the big one—the championship. However, the only way to accomplish this in team sports is to be a team player and to play on a team that is committed to teamwork.

The Seahawks just won the Superbowl, the World Championship! It wasn't the result of one great quarterback, the "Legion of Boom," or even the 12th Man - it was the entire team and Seattle is proud of them all!

Similarly, in the church of Jesus Christ *the team that serves together stays together and wins together*. However, the team that becomes consumed with individual accolades will falter and be forgotten. In 1 Cor 3:1-9, Paul is going to coach us to play up to our spiritual potential. He does this by laying out two coaching tips. First, Paul says, "**Recognize your faulty perspective (3:1-4)**," and secondly, "**Remember your role in God's work (3:5-9)**" Read more teamwork tips by Paul at [Bible.org](#). Who knew that Paul and the Seahawks had so much in common! Edited from "Teamwork or Turf Wars" by Keith Krell

Praying Toward Sunday

Loving God, we seek to follow your desire
And walk in your ways
To observe your commandment
Love God, love self, love others

Bless, O God, this land and
All the lands of the earth
Fill the minds and hearts
Of leaders with wisdom

As your servants may we labor
For Your purposes, building
Gardening, watering,
Reconciling, growing – peace

May we work together
Sister and brother, brother
And sister, as God's field
God's gift to you, to me

Loving God, we seek to follow your desire
And walk in your ways
To observe your commandments
Love God, love self, love others
Amen.

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3rd Reading: [1 Corinthians 3:1-9](#)

Even though the Corinthians had the Spirit, why couldn't they be considered spiritual (3:1-4)? What illustration does Paul use in verses 6-9 to describe himself and Apollos? In what ways is God's church like a field being planted (vv. 6-9)? How does this chapter affect your view of your own ministry in the church and that of professional ministers? [Quiet Time Bible Study, InterVarsity Press](#)

4th Reading: [Matthew 5:21-37](#)

Jesus discusses various misconceptions we might have about the Law (Old Testament Scriptures). Why do you think that Jesus stresses that he did not come to abolish the Law (5:17-20)? How does Jesus' teaching on murder and adultery (5:21-30) differ from the traditional understanding? [Quiet Time Bible Study, InterVarsity Press](#) Which of Jesus' teachings in today's Gospel do you find most difficult? It is a great compliment to be called "a person of his/her word." Who would you name as such a person? What "yes" that God asks is most challenging for you? What "no" that God asks is easiest for you? [Proclaiming Faith](#)