

## SERMON FOR FEBRUARY 16, 2014

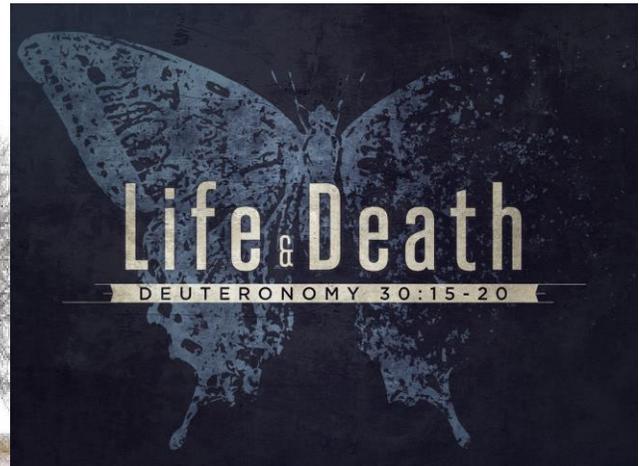
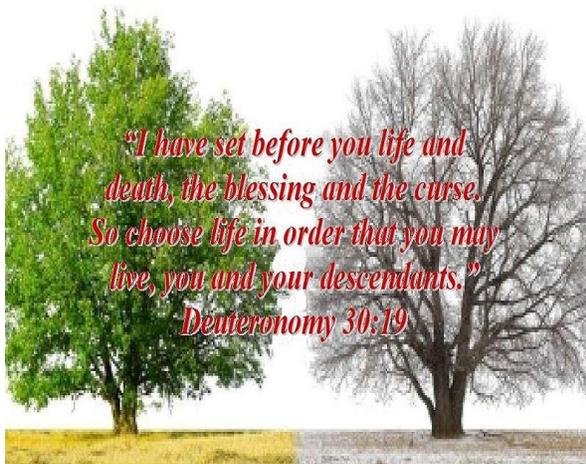
The First Chinese Church of Christ in Hawai'i UCC  
6<sup>th</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany

7:45 & 10:30 Worship Services

Scripture: Deuteronomy 30:15-20;

**Matthew 5:21-37 (Focus)**

Message: ***SOTM Series#3: GOD is Able to Work on the Hardest Places in our Hearts and to Soften Them So that we Can Love GOD & our Neighbors!***



## Gathering in the Word

Joy and wholeness (*completeness, unity, fullness*) are not accidental in the biblical tradition! This morning's OT & NT readings turn us toward health of body, mind, and spirit—and assert and declare that personal and communal well-being are the result of integrating our inner and outer lives—and our values and behavior.

## Hearing the Word

### Deuteronomy 30:15-20 (The VOICE Bible)

<sup>15</sup> Look, I've given you *two* choices today: you can have life with all the good things it brings, or death and all the bad things it brings. <sup>16</sup> If you do what I've commanded you today and love the Eternal your God; if you live as he wants you to, if you obey his commands, regulations and judgments, then you'll live and have many descendants. He will bless you in the land where you're going to live. <sup>17</sup> But if your heart turns away and you don't listen, if you go astray and you bow down to other gods and worship them, <sup>18</sup> then today I assure you you'll be destroyed. You'll cross the Jordan *River* into the land that's going to belong to you, but you won't live there very long at all.

*Covenants between two people are typically witnessed by a third party. If one person doesn't live up to his obligations and tries to argue that it was not necessary, the other person can then appeal to the witness to confirm the original terms of the agreement. Moses calls on the sky and the land to be the witnesses here. They will always be around to testify about the covenant terms that were offered to the people and how they agreed to them. The formal treaty and its supplement have now*

*been drawn up and witnessed. The only business remaining is to establish how the treaty will be carried on once the people who originally made it are gone. The Lord chooses Joshua to succeed Moses, to lead Israel into the land and represent them in their relationship with him.*

**Moses:** <sup>19</sup>I'm calling on the heavens and the earth to be the witnesses against you. I gave you the choice today between life and death, between being blessed or being cursed. Choose life, so that you and your descendants may live! <sup>20</sup> If you love the Eternal your God and listen to his voice and always remain loyal to him, for he is your life, then you'll be able to live a long time in the land the Eternal promised to give to your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

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The word "law" can be understood in a couple of ways:

- ✓ A law reflects the way someone decides how things should be. So the 55 MPH sign on the freeway says to don't drive 56 or 60 MPH!
- ✓ Another kind of law that you can detect is when someone speaks of the "law of gravity" or the "second law of thermodynamics." This sense of law does suggest to us how things very simply **are** in all situations.

Too often we make the mistake of thinking that GOD's laws are like the 55 MPH signs on the freeway—the laws are just arbitrary hoops GOD has decided that we should jump through.

**But** however—as the people of GOD—we need to know that GOD’s laws are like gravity—**GOD gave us these guidelines and rules as a kind of owner’s manual for life on earth. These rules describe the ways things simply are.** GOD wants GOD’s people—all of us—to be safe, healthy and well. But GOD knew that for shalom [*GOD’s word for wholeness and goodness and total satisfaction in life*] to come, it would come best and easiest and the most quickly when we all follow the *owner’s guide book* for life in the Promised Land!

### **Matthew 5:21-37 (The VOICE Bible)**

*Righteousness is the reason Jesus has come—to make the people righteous through and through. He then begins to interpret the law of Scripture for them with this in mind.*

<sup>21</sup> As you know, long ago God instructed Moses to tell his people, “Do not murder; those who murder will be judged and punished.” <sup>22</sup> But here is the even harder truth: anyone who is angry with his brother will be judged for his anger. Anyone who taunts his friend, speaks contemptuously toward him, or calls him “Loser” or “Fool” or “Scum,” will have to answer to the high court. And anyone who calls his brother a fool may find himself in the fires of hell.

<sup>23</sup> Therefore, if you are bringing an offering to God and you remember that your brother is angry at you or holds a grudge against you, <sup>24</sup> then leave your gift before the altar, go to your brother, repent and forgive one another, be reconciled, and then return to the altar to offer your gift to God.

<sup>25</sup> If someone sues you, settle things with him quickly. Talk to him as you are walking to court; otherwise, he may turn matters over to the judge, and the judge may turn you over to an officer, and you may land in jail. <sup>26</sup> I tell you this: you will not emerge from prison until you have paid your last penny.

<sup>27</sup> As you know, long ago God forbade his people to commit adultery. <sup>28</sup> You may think you have abided by this Commandment, walked the straight and narrow, but I tell you this: any man who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery in his heart. <sup>29</sup> If your right eye leads you into sin, gouge it out and throw it in the garbage—for better you lose one part of your body than march your entire body through the gates of sin and into hell. <sup>30</sup> And if your right hand leads you into sin, cut it off and throw it away—for better you lose one part of your body than march your entire body through the gates of sin and into hell.

<sup>31</sup> And here is something else: you have read in Deuteronomy that anyone who divorces his wife must do so fairly—he must give her the requisite certificate of divorce and send her on her way, free and unfettered.

<sup>32</sup> But I tell you this: unless your wife cheats on you, you must not divorce her, period. Nor are you to marry someone who has been married and divorces, for a divorced person who remarries commits adultery.

<sup>33</sup> You know that God expects us to abide by the oaths we swear and the promises we make. <sup>34</sup> But I tell you this: do not ever swear an oath. What is an oath? You cannot say, “I swear by heaven”—for heaven is not yours to swear by; it is God’s throne. <sup>35</sup> And you cannot say, “I

swear by this good earth," for the earth is not yours to swear by; it is God's footstool. And you cannot say, "I swear by the holy city Jerusalem," for it is not yours to swear by; it is the city of God, the capital of the King of kings. <sup>36</sup> You cannot even say that you swear by your own head, for God has dominion over your hands, your lips, your head. It is he who determines if your hair be straight or curly, white or black; it is he who rules over even this small scrap of creation. <sup>37</sup> You need not swear an oath—any impulse to do so is of evil. Simply let your "yes" be "yes," and let your "no" be "no."

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In our Matthew lesson, we normally think of the Beatitudes and Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (SOTM) as gentle, soothing, and peaceful.

**Matthew 5 is a radical teaching! What Jesus is teaching and telling us here is getting our attention back to the basics and the root origin of GOD's commands!**

"You haven't slept with a woman who is not your wife? Good for you. But you looked at your co-worker Malia and thought about it so that the '*Do not commit adultery*' command is in shambles in your life as far as GOD is concerned."

"You haven't stabbed anyone through the chest or shoved someone to his/her death off a cliff? Good for you but when in your anger you told Kimo last week to go take a flying leap, in GOD's eyes the '*Do not murder*' command snapped quite cleanly in two in your life."

“You haven’t sworn out a false oath in GOD’s name? Good for you but when you knowingly lied to your boss about what you did while attending the convention by saying ‘I swear by my children this is not true,’ then in GOD’s eyes the ‘Do not give false witness’ command died a sudden death because your children are GOD’s children and they bear GOD’s image.”

**Tough stuff!** So is Jesus is *changing* the Law into something new and different? **No—Jesus is radicalizing the Law—Jesus is bringing everyone back to the roots of why GOD gave the Law in the first place!**

Jesus is teaching us that the Law of GOD was meant to *foster human flourishing* at every level—including the deepest levels of our hearts and minds!

- ✓ GOD wants us to respect each other!
- ✓ GOD wants us to love each other and see GOD’s own image residing and living deep within one another!

We are not to use people as pawns, as objects of lust (*sexual desire*), as receptacles for our scorn and disrespect, as the target for our desires to brutalize, manipulate, and then throw away! **NO!**

- ✓ How we treat one another at church and outside of church matters!
- ✓ How we talk to each other matters!
- ✓ How we regard and look upon each other matters!

**This not just how we Christians treat just only Christians—this is about everyone—including the homeless/houseless around and on our campus!**

- ✓ It's always about other people around us!
- ✓ Do we think it doesn't matter how furious we are at every driver who cuts us off—or comes into our lane or makes a mistake in traffic?
- ✓ Do we think it's pleasant to hold a grudge for years against someone—especially when we run in to them and just smile but inside we are all mad?
- ✓ Do we think that that good looking guy or that beautiful woman exists for our pleasure only?
- ✓ Do we think that this other person who just asked us a question is so worthless as to be undeserving of hearing the truth such that we will play GOD in his/her life by dictating his/her grasp of reality?

**Jesus does really nail every last one of us and there is a sense that the larger function of Jesus' teaching on the Law does cast us back to the reliance on grace alone. We are all sufficiently mired and caught up in sin and selfishness that we know full well how easy it is to see ourselves in the pictures Jesus sketches in these Matthew 5:21-37 verses!!!**

**But Jesus is not just being tough on us: Jesus is at the end of the day is reminding us of a truth that is actually so very encouraging: GOD created all of us to flourish in GOD's good creation! GOD WANTS ALL OF US TO FLOURISH, THRIVE, GROW, AND DO WELL!**

### **Doing the Word**

So what is GOD's Word for us this morning?

## **1. ONE: OUR RELATIONSHIPS MATTER TO GOD!**

- ✓ GOD indeed cares about our relationships (and not just relationships to Christians).
- ✓ God cares deeply and passionately how we treat one another because GOD loves each and all of us—so much!
- ✓ How we treat and care for each other every day matters to GOD!

## **2.TWO: GOD CARES THAT WE KEEP THE LAW FOR OUR SAKE!**

- ✓ GOD truly loves us—all of us!
- ✓ The Law is GOD's precious gift of an adoring parent given to beloved children—urging us to treat each other well!
- ✓ So let's pay attention and keep practicing and living GOD's Law every day!

## **3.THREE: GOD SO LOVES US THAT GOD WANTS US TO TEND AND CARE FOR THOSE RELATIONSHIPS RATHER THAN COME TO CHURCH (verses 23-24)!**

- ✓ Sometimes we need to nurture, care, and spend time in our relationships!
- ✓ So if you can't make it to church—that okay!

### **Sent in the Word**

Practice: So right now in your pew—where you're seated—I want you to call to mind one of the relationships in your life that is most important to you:

**First:** I want you (by yourself) to call to mind one of the relationships in your life that is most important to you—one that is healthy and whole and good and sustains, supports and nourishes you. I want you to now think about what makes that relationship a good relationship—about why it's so important for you! I now want you to give GOD thanks for that person and the relationship you share with him/her!

(Time of Silence for Prayers)

**Second:** I want you to call to mind another relationship that is important to you but that has suffered some damage . . . I don't want you to figure out who was to blame for the hurt—but rather to hold that person and relationship in prayer. I want you to offer that broken relationship to GOD as your offering and as an arena of GOD's help and healing. I invite you to think about what action you can take to move that relationship to a better place!

(Time of Silence for Prayers)

**Our joy and our health come from the alignment and bringing together of our heart and hands, our thoughts and deeds; and our emotions and actions!**

**As our GOD is a GOD of grace—so too we the people of GOD at TFCCCH are to be a community of GOD's grace in our relationships all!**

**AMEN?**

**AMEN!**