Matthew 5:21-32, Deuteronomy 30:15-20
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The Rev. Dr. Mark W. Jennings

Lots of you know that we are in the midst of confirmation for some of the youth. This year we have a group of seven young people going through a process of learning about faith and the church and deciding whether or not they want to confirm the commitment that was made for them in their baptism. Meredith is leading this group with a little bit of help from me, and I will admit, that I'm a lot tougher on them than Meredith is. I want them to memorize things—the Lord's prayer, the Apostles' Creed and the Ten Commandments. And all of those take some explaining also. Take the commandments. We all know the Ten Commandments, don't we? We probably had to memorize them in Sunday School when we were kids and if we were pressed, we could probably name most of them pretty quickly. But what if I were to ask you, which one would you like to change? Think about that for a minute. Which of the Ten Commandments would you like to get rid of if you could, or at least significantly change? Which one would it be? Let's take the one about the Sabbath Day. Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy. We've already changed that one. Not only do we not worship and keep holy the seventh day, Saturday, we don't even keep Sunday holy, do we? People work on Sunday, we save Sundays for shopping, going out to eat, lots of our kids sports are on Sundays. We don't follow that one anyway, let's just get rid of it. Well, what about the one that says "Don't take the Lord's name in vain." OMG. We ought to be able to admit that we can get rid of that one, no one follows it anyway. And let's throw in don't covet. We covet all the time. We have so many TV shows that highlight what someone else has and wouldn't it be great if we had it too, that we can confidently say that we've already gotten

rid of that silly commandment about not coveting. Well, what about don't steal, we should at least be able to follow that one, right? Maybe I shouldn't bring this one up now, some of us still haven't done our taxes yet. And fudging on our taxes, isn't really stealing, right? When they say don't steal, they mean from individuals not from governments or big business, nobody gets hurt if we take a little from them, who will notice? What about honoring your father and mother? We can all get behind that one. Except what does it really mean to honor your father and mother? What about those of us who do not get along with our parents? What about those of us whose parents were neglectful or even abusive or just absent? They didn't earn our honor, right? So maybe we want to change that one to honor just the deserving parents. So, you shall not kill, you shall not murder—that one is pretty straightforward. We're not going to kill anyone, except maybe in a war, or in self-defense, or by means of capital punishment.

Are there any of these that we can follow? Or do we want to change all of them? Good thing Jesus comes along and calls us to follow him so that we don't have to follow any of those Old Testament laws anymore. We don't have to follow those laws about food and about clothing and about letting our hair grow and things like that. Since Jesus came, we can ignore the whole of the Old Testament and just follow his teachings. That's what he's doing in this passage, right? He's taking examples of Old Testament laws and showing how they don't apply anymore. At least that's what we want him to be saying. In fact, can't we just ignore the whole Old Testament, except where it talks about Jesus, of course. It's so legalistic and so violent. It's almost like it's talking about two different gods, one of punishment and vengeance in the Old Testament and one of love in the New. We don't want the God of Deuteronomy that Sandra read for us, warning us that if we

don't follow exactly what he tells us to do that we'll be punished. Who wants that kind of God?

But that's not the kind of God we have. That's where we misunderstand the Law and we misunderstand Jesus. When God says in Deuteronomy that we have a choice before us between death and life, he does not mean that if we choose wrong, he will punish us. Rather if we choose wrong, the wrong choice itself is its own punishment. There are two kinds of laws. One law is like speeding laws—don't drive more than 30 miles an hour in the village or you'll get a ticket. You violate that law and you might get punished, you're welcome to try it and see. And there are laws like the law of gravity. You can test that by walking out a three story window and see if you fall. These are laws that just describe how the universe works. By and large, God's laws are the second kind, not the first. They are descriptions of how the universe was created to be. Earlier in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says that he has not come to abolish the Law but to fulfill it, to complete it. When he says you heard that it was said of old, you shall not kill, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not break your covenants, but I say to you .. . . he's not changing the law, in a way he is deepening it. The law against killing is a law that says that we are made to be in relationship with one another. Killing breaks that bond, but other things do too. It's not just that we shouldn't kill, it's that we should take care of one another. In the commandment about adultery Jesus shows us that this is not just a matter of what we do, it is about the intentions of our heart. If we care only about ourselves we will break the law, whether we do it with our bodies or not. If we break our covenants with our spouse because of our selfishness, we are not following God's intention for us. These verses describe what God intends for us. Loving, forgiving, respecting the other, life-

long commitments—isn't that what God intends for his creation? We don't always live up to that do we? No, we don't. But Jesus is giving us concrete examples of how to live out the commandments in these verses. And by the commandments I don't just mean the Ten Commandments. And I don't mean all the six hundred odd laws that are listed in the Old Testament. We are supposed to live our lives according to the Law, but how can we do that? Two rabbis were once challenged to teach the entirety of the law while standing on one foot. One rabbis scoffed at the impossibility of such a task, while the other rabbi Hillel simply stood on one foot and said, "What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow: this is the whole Law; the rest is the explanation; go and learn." Later in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus will say almost the same thing to a man who wants to inherit eternal life—how to follow all the laws? Love the Lord your God with your whole being, and love your neighbor as yourself. That's the whole of the law. This is what life in the Christian community should look like.

But we don't always do it, do we? We don't always choose life, do we? We get angry, we give in to lust and selfishness, we break our covenants, we hurt one another. What do we do when we break the law? The important thing to notice about these sayings, the important thing to notice about the whole Sermon on the Mount is that it is about relationships. This is not about breaking the law and punishments we incur. It is about our relationship with God and with one another. And we can't take these sayings apart from the one who says them. The one gathering his disciples on the hill that day is the one who loves us, who wants us to love him and to love one another, and through whose Spirit we are empowered to live this new life in Christian community. Jesus is not a new lawgiver in the way that Moses was. Jesus did not come to give us a new testament, a new law. Jesus came to make *us* new. This is what the new life looks like—if we will give ourselves to him—and through him become as Christ to one another. It's not a matter of what we are doing, it is who we are becoming.