Good morning, Pine Ridge Family!

*“For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 5:20*

We are all in trouble. In the passage for this morning, Matthew 5:20-26 Jesus takes on everyone who thinks that they are just all right – not too bad – nothing horribly guilty. It is the classic response to the notion that one might be a sinner worthy of eternal condemnation. It is the answer, “Well, I never killed anyone, yet.” Perish the thought that they have done anything worthy of Hell! They are only a little bad around the edges. Nothing to worry about. Nothing that anyone could *really* complain about.

In saying that your righteousness needs to exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees He takes on two concepts at once. First, that the scribes and Pharisees had arrived at righteousness. This was the common idea in Jesus time. With all their rules and piety they must be right with God. Why, everyone knows that, especially the Pharisees themselves! Just ask them. To say that your righteousness must exceed their righteousness is to say that their righteousness is not enough! That worked in the Jews to shock them!

The second thing Jesus was claiming by this statement was that righteousness could not be attained by human efforts. The whole nation was going about it the wrong way. Jesus needed to shock them before He would reveal to them that everyone who thought that they might have enough righteousness to “get by” were in fact heading to Hell.

He does this by comparing actions and thoughts. If you threaten to kill someone, you can say that all day long and the police may come and warn you, but they cannot charge you until you have taken an action in that direction. However, God is not us. He is God over all His creation and our thoughts are as open to Him as our actions are to men on earth. After all, He made both. David recognized this fact a thousand years earlier when he wrote in Psalm 139, *”O Lord, You have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar. You scrutinize my path and my lying down, and are intimately acquainted with all my ways. Even before there is a word on my tongue, behold, O Lord, You know it all.”*

So our thoughts make us just as guilty as our deeds to God. Both condemn us. In particular, hating our brother is just as if we killed him. God says, “Don’t come worshiping Me if you hate your brother. Leave this offering you have brought and be reconciled with him first. Then you may come to Me!” Matt. 5:23-24

This story is foundational to a theme that will run through Matthew’s gospel and all the New Testament. God forgives us a huge amount when He forgives us our sins. If we become His children, then we must reflect the very nature of our Father. We must forgive each other.

The point of this is that no one is righteous. This is proved in our selfish treatment of one another. True righteousness will be reflected in one who loves and forgives, just as God for us.

In Christ, our Lord…

Pastor EA