

From the Epistle of the Day: **So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.** [Romans 6.11]

From the Holy Gospel: **“For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”** [Matthew 5.20]

**Today, the Holy Gospel for this 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity provides the reason that this has become known as “Righteousness Sunday” among the churches that retain the traditional One-Year Series of lessons. For you hear Jesus saying these rather shocking words, “For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of God.” You will see again today that God’s bench marks concerning righteousness are much higher than many Christians suppose and assume.**

**Thus, through the lessons for this 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity, God’s Word about “righteousness” puts you on “The Hot Spot.”**

**I.**

**At the heart of the sin-problem, as Jesus exposes it, is the heart and mind**

**that perpetually compromises the Law of God. So it is that Jesus warns in the Holy Gospel, “For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of God.” Respectability does not cut it with God! Better-than-average does not cut it with God! Trying your best does not come close to a righteousness that avails before God. Your best efforts and my best sincerity falls far short!**

**Perhaps clarity is coming concerning the average person on the street’s response to Jesus! The down-and-outers like him, because then, as now, the rich are targets for jealousy and resentment. But for the middle-class Christian, Jesus goes over line in His treatment of the Pharisees. They are sinners, sure, but they are pretty good role models, and they benefit society. They teach a Law that you can be comfortable**

with – doing your best. They handle the Scriptures in a way that is – oh, how shall we put it – ah, yes! Practical! Yes, the Pharisees answer the popular call, “Tell us what to do, now that we’re Christians!” The Pharisees are the people who answer that call, and for that the average Christian, now as then, seems quite pleased.

But Jesus isn’t pleased – He is not-pleased on your behalf, whether you can appreciate it or not! When Jesus says that your righteousness – and mine – has to be of a much more strict and demanding nature than what public morality at-its-best sets forth, He actually is not just setting out to raise the bar to keep you trying harder! He is setting the bar totally and forever out-of-reach to get you to **STOP TRYING!**

Look! If a man with a gun to your head tells you to take off your shoes or he will shoot you, you’d probably get bare-foot in an instant, trying to meet his demand. If he takes you to

the Arkansas River and tells you to swim across it or he’ll shoot you, you might try that, too, still trying to meet his demand. But, if he tells you to swim Arkansas, upstream, all the way to Salida – you may just give up, or you may wrestle him for the gun, but surely, you will stop trying to meet his demands.

The Law of God demands – always! Yes, it curbs the worst in mankind from popping up here and there, and Yes, it instructs the mind as to what is and isn’t in the will of God. But, all along and always, it demands! It demands nothing less than perpetual perfection! It demands what you cannot – cannot – cannot produce! And that is the way that God intends it! He intends the Law to demand the impossible, precisely, so that you will **STOP TRYING** to meet its demands, so that you will do something different with the Law! You will turn to God and repent!

When you are trying to meet the Law, you are

**missing its purpose. Its purpose is to get you to get utterly serious about your sin! To see it for it is in God's eyes! To stop trying, and to start casting yourself on the mercy of God with a heart and mind that say, "Nothing – Nothing – Nothing in my hands I bring! Simply to Thy cross I cling!**

**And that is precisely what the Law is intended by God to do in your heart and mind. It is why He gives you this Law. Clinging to the cross is like clinging to your spouse. There is never a time to say, "OK, now I'll just let go and do something else!" No! Everything you do in life is while clinging to the wife or husband that God has given you to and given to you.**

**Marriage, you see is a life, not just a series of behaviors to do – guys, this is why the "honey-do" list is perpetual full – but I digress! And, now you might see why Jesus uses the "Bride of Christ" to describe the Church and to describe you – male or**

**female – in that Church! The message is this: Stop trying to completely be the bride of Christ, so that you can just live in that state that God bestows upon you!**

**The righteousness that you need to fulfill God's Law is beyond you – and the stern demands of the Law are intended, not to keep you in "the hot spot," not that you try harder, but that you realize that righteousness is not attainable by you! It is always and only yours as a gift, a gift of God's love and grace and mercy toward you. The more seriously you take your sin, the more you will see the blessing and freedom that comes only from God, through the cross, to you, as a gift – a gift that is yours forever!**