

Such a nice, comforting text, isn't it? At least here, in these few words of Jesus' sermon, we are not confronted with the tearing out of our eyeballs and the cutting off of our hands, or with the fire of hell for calling our brother a fool, or with lust being the same thing as adultery, as well as divorce. Today, in this sermon, we will only deal with "*coming to terms with our accuser on the way to court with him.*"

But who is that? Is it not the brother with whom we are angry? Whom we insulted, and whom we called a fool? And could it not also be the spouse whom we hurt because of our lusting? Maybe even divorced?

These are our accusers, are they not? And at this very moment, we are on the way to court with them. The court date is already on the calendar, and it will not be changed. It is the Day of Judgment. A day we know not, but only He who is the Judge.

No wonder Jesus says, "*Come to terms quickly...*" Do not put it off. Reconcile now. Tomorrow may be too late. And do not think that you will win in court against your accuser. Yet, people do think that. Do we? "Let Judgment Day come! I'm ready. I'm innocent. My hands are clean." But it's not your hands that are the problem. Even if you were to tear out your eyes and cut off your hands, there would still be plenty of evidence against you and me, because your heart, and my heart, are guilty of all charges.

Murder and adultery take place in the heart. That is not what Jesus' disciples are hearing from other teachers in their day. But Jesus sets them straight. And us too. No matter where your eyes have looked, what your mouth has spoken. or what your hands have done, you have a heart, and so do I, out of which proceeds all manner of wickedness.

We are on our way to court. The courtroom is Judgment Day. The judge is God, who sees all and knows all. And all of our accusers are on the way with us. Do we even have a prayer? Or will we be handed over to the guard to be thrown into the hellish prison until we have paid the last penny?

These words of Jesus' sermon are not words that any of us enjoy hearing. They are like the sharp scalpel in the hands of the surgeon. Words that, rather than heal, pierce, cut, rip apart, and expose. But how necessary is the scalpel. There can be no healing unless, first, our sinful hearts are exposed.

If everyone really and truly believed what Jesus is saying here in His sermon, they would be beating down our doors to come in here, desperate for help, for good news, for hope.

Do we have a prayer? Do they? Yes, we do. Jesus' prayer from the cross: "*Father, forgive them.*" The One who holds the scalpel of these cutting words in His hands, gave up those very hands to His crucifiers. Jesus is the one who was torn out, cut off, and thrown into the hell of fire on the cross. And there on that cross, He paid even the last penny of what you owe.

And not just you. Everyone. All sinners. From the least of them to the greatest of them. Jesus' bloody death on the cross reconciled God to you, and to everyone.

What, then, about our accusers? What about that brother of ours whom we insulted? Whom we called a fool? After all, as Jesus says in His sermon, we are on the way to court with them. And their accusations are true. The sins are there. They are in our hearts. They know it and we know it.

But they are not the judge. You have a judge. And on Judgment Day you will stand before Him. But never forget, never, that there was One who was already stood up on a cross before Him in your place. And so, hear these words of St. Paul in Romans 8 – words which are true today and on Judgment Day: *“Who shall bring any accusation against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the One who died... who was raised, who is praying for us.”*

There is no accusation against you that can stand, my friend. God does not condemn you. He forgives you. Jesus made certain of this for you. He died for you, more, He baptized you into His death and resurrection. In those waters He gives you a new heart, a clean heart, a heart forgiven of all sin. There is nothing you have done, nothing in your heart, that your accusers can point to. It is all forgiven. All of you are forgiven.

And because you are forgiven, baptized into Jesus' death and resurrection, your life will be different. You will not hate your brother in your heart. You will love him. You will not call him a fool, but one for whom Christ died. You will turn away when you are tempted by lust. You will live with your spouse, if you have one, with forgiveness ruling in your home.

This is what God's forgiveness effects within us. This is the power of your baptism. You live under grace and not under the wrath of God. You are not afraid of your Judge. You love Him because He died and rose again for you.

In a few minutes you will be coming up, not to court, but to the Lord's Table. Is there someone here, or anyone, with whom you have had angry words? Do not come up harboring anger in your heart. This is the place of forgiveness. This house is the house of mercy. And since God has forgiven you, forgiveness will reign in your heart. Be at peace with one another, for God, for Jesus' sake, is at peace with you. Amen.