

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

February 12, 2023



LIABLE

dealing with greater responsibility

by Drew Downs

Legal liability is something most people are afraid of. A slip and fall can bankrupt a business. Or think of the tobacco settlement.

When it comes to holding ourselves liable for our own actions, however, we are far less concerned. After all, we're human.

Liability is a particular kind of responsibility, isn't it? We associate it with blame. Something we work incredibly hard in

avoiding (and placing). But there is something deeply destructive in blame and something deeply constructive in liability.

Blaming the victim of violence is wrong on every level. But also, *blaming anyone* isn't the same as holding an aggressor *liable* for their actions. The aggressor is responsible and must be held responsible. They are *liable*. And it is telling that the powerful are far more afraid of liability than blame.

AFTER THE EPIPHANY

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WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

Unseen Improvements

A year ago, a small team from St. Stephen's joined the first cohort of a pioneer collaboration between the Diocese of Indianapolis and the Diocese of Northern Indiana. The project, *Church Buildings for Collaborative Partnerships* is an opportunity to learn how to leverage this physical asset, our church building, into a source of collaboration within our community.

As we continue to grow our ministry to the food and shelter insecure, we looked to the *other* most obvious character of our community. St. Stephen's is a member of the Arts Corridor along 7th Street. So, to help facilitate our participation with the arts community, we decided to address our sound system.

The project includes the moving of our current speaker and the mounting of a second, new handhelds and microphones, a hearing assist system, and movable sound system for the Great Hall. A grant funded by the Lilly Foundation will cover half of the cost.

A second project (also years in the making) has already begun. This one provides secure, wired internet throughout the building, cameras for exterior security, and a revamped phone system.

While neither of these projects is without cost, they are necessary, nearly invisible infrastructure we need and I encourage your financial support for them. They will greatly improve our experience of our historic building, and the experience of our ministry partners.

With love,
Drew

AFTER THE EPIPHANY

2023

FOR SUNDAY

The Sixth Sunday After the Epiphany

February 12, 2023

Collect

O God, the strength of all who put their trust in you: Mercifully accept our prayers; and because in our weakness we can do nothing good without you, give us the help of your grace, that in keeping your commandments we may please you both in will and deed; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

Reading

From Matthew 5:21-37

"But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment;"

Reflection

Jesus uses an interesting phrase: "You have heard it said...but I say to you." This is a familiar teaching technique. It is essentially: "You were taught this, but I'm teaching you..."

The difference, of course, is that the people didn't learn this in school. And Jesus isn't offering them "new math".

He is wrestling with existing teaching, passed down through Hebrew Scripture and teaching in Synagogues. It really is like he's saying, *all the voices in our culture have told you_____ but I'm telling you now _____.*

AFTER THE EPIPHANY

And the thing that Jesus tells them sounds a lot like, you were taught not to *do* bad things, but I'm telling you not to even *think* bad things. Each of the teachings this week ramp up the original teaching. Like he's in Spinal Tap and cranking the Law up to 11.

Here, of course, we must remember that Jesus just said that he didn't come to abolish the Law, but fulfill it. So this amping up of the Law really is him trying to teach it.

I suspect that, just as Jesus needed to tell his hearers he wasn't trying to ditch the Law, or *supersede it*, we must *again* temper our own cynical feelings toward the Law. That Jesus isn't *improving* on the Law or *expanding* it, but helping us truly understand what is at the root of it.

The command to reject murder is not to be seen so narrowly that we think everything short of it is OK with God, because if God really meant it, those Ten Commandments would be way more specific. God would've had Moses enumerate all that nuance into those tablets.

Murder is when sin crosses the line into community-destroying behavior. It is not where the sin begins.

Jesus breathes new life into the Law in a way we are inclined to miss. He is naming where liability for relationship health lies. Not in the irrevocable sin of permanent destruction, but in the place that would lead to that permanence *if we did not prevent it from getting that far*.

By focusing only on the behaviors (and also, perhaps, the motivations!) we might therefore forget *why* these commandments exist: for the community's flourishing. These are commands to improve our relationships. With each other and our neighborhood. Relationships we can protect, not just from murder, but from all manner of sin, abuse, and hatred.

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