**1 Samuel 19:1-10** September 2, 2018

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** The 8th Commandment

*1 Samuel 19:1[King] Saul told his son Jonathan and all the attendants to kill David. But Jonathan was very fond of David 2and warned him, “My father Saul is looking for a chance to kill you. Be on your guard tomorrow morning; go into hiding and stay there. 3I will go out and stand with my father in the field where you are. I’ll speak to him about you and will tell you what I find out.”*

*4Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father and said to him, “Let not the king do wrong to his servant David; he has not wronged you, and what he has done has benefited you greatly. 5He took his life in his hands when he killed the Philistine. The Lord won a great victory for all Israel, and you saw it and were glad. Why then would you do wrong to an innocent man like David by killing him for no reason?” 6Saul listened to Jonathan and took this oath: “As surely as the Lord lives, David will not be put to death.”*

*7So Jonathan called David and told him the whole conversation. He brought him to Saul, and David was with Saul as before.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

Imagine sitting down to a Sunday dinner at home over your all-time favorite meal After the meal you have no responsibility, so you can leisurely enjoy your meal, then sit down, read a book, watch a game, joke around with friends, or take a nap. In short, it is the perfect meal on the perfect day.

With that picture of contentment in mind, I invite you to listen to this Bible passage from the book of Proverbs: *“The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to a man’s inmost parts.”* Juicy gossip is just like that, isn’t it. When you hear some really incriminating news about someone you don’t like, it’s like chewing a steak, sipping an expensive wine, gobbling up a chocolate bar. Yum, yum, yum! And when you are done listing to the gossip that you always knew was true even though no-one else even imagined it, it’s kind of like you can retire to the couch after a good meal for a long nap. *“The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to a man’s inmost parts.”*

Or maybe this is not true of you. Maybe you always tell tale bearers to stop. Maybe you steadfastly defend other people’s reputations, even when you don’t like that person’s politics, manners or sense of humor. Maybe you always walk out of the room when the conversation turns to personal attacks. Maybe.

Each of us has a chink in our armor. Each of us has one of the Ten Commandments that has always been a particular challenge. The first? The fifth? Or maybe this one, the eighth, “You shall not bear false testimony against your neighbor.” For many, this one is especially difficult. May God’s Word today guide us to treasure God’s forgiveness for our failures in this Commandment. And may God’s Word, out of respect and thankfulness to God, lead us to honor the reputations of all the people.

**And Today, in the Court of Public Opinion…**

Now some might say, “This commandment says, *‘Do not give false testimony.’* It’s talking about the courtroom! Not my day-to-day conversation.” To be sure, the most basic meaning is about the courtroom. God wants our testimony in a courtroom to be “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.” But this, like all the commandments, has a much deeper meaning.

The question we should ask with this commandment is not so much what the commandment prohibits as what it protects. As “Do not kill” is a protection of human life; as “Do not commit adultery” protects marriage and the home, so “You shall not bear false testimony” protects reputations.

Here, then, we now are in a different courtroom. Not the Hardin County District Court, but the court of public opinion. We enter this court every day. We *testify* in this court every day. Every time we speak anything about anyone else, we are testifying in the court of public opinion.

Today God’s word puts in front of us a practical example of how the Eighth Commandment is supposed to work in the court of public opinion. It comes to us from the 19th chapter of 1 Samuel. Here we have three characters: Saul, Jonathan and David. Saul is the king of Israel at the time. Jonathan is his son, the crown prince. The third person is David, who is not yet a king, but a citizen. God has declared that David will one day be the next king and that Saul’s family will *not* have the thrown. Saul knows this. Additionally, David is a charismatic young warrior who has led Israel in several successful military campaigns. Complicating things, Saul’s son, Jonathan, is a friend of his rival David. Saul feels profoundly threatened. All but the best of kings would be suspicious and jealous of David. Saul was not the best of kings. Which is why ***“Saul told his son Jonathan and all the attendants to kill David.”***

When Jonathan heard his dad tell him to kill his own best friend, he immediately went to his best friend, “David, make yourself scarce.” He continues, ***“I will go out and stand with my father in the field where you are. I’ll speak to him about you and will tell you what I find out.”*** What don’t you not hear? I don’t hear Jonathan complaining about his off-his-rocker dad. I don’t hear Jonathan saying, “There he goes again!” He speaks as much truth as is needed to keep David safe, and leaves it at that. No character assassination.

Then he does the amazing. Now remember, Jonathan *should* be next in line to the throne. If David lives, Jonathan cannot be king. Yet Jonathan’s first concern is for a good relationship between his father and his friend, rather than his own future.

Listen to what manly, firm words he speaks! How he defends his friend! At the same time, what respect he shows toward his father! Oh, how I wish I could speak like this more often! ***“Let not the king do wrong to his servant David; he has not wronged you, and what he has done has benefited you greatly. He took his life in his hands when he killed the Philistine. The Lord won a great victory for all Israel, and you saw it and were glad. Why then would you do wrong to an innocent man like David by killing him for no reason?”*** He encourages his father to do right. He reminds him of better times. Jonathan does this, not just out of a concern for David, but out of a concern for Saul. “Dad, I don’t want you to fall into sinful ways!”

Just think of all the possible things Jonathan could have done. He could have taken David’s side, complaining about Saul’s wicked ways. Jonathan could have taken his father’s side and covetously guarded his claim to the throne against David. He could have just stood back and thought, “I’ll let these two duke it out, and then find out where I stand.” But as Jonathan appraises the situation, all concerns for himself melt away.

Here we see, “Love your neighbor as yourself” applied to the Eighth Commandment. Jonathan steps into the court of public opinion on behalf of both Saul and David. He speaks well of both. He risks being taken for a fool. He risks losing their friendship. He defends the reputation of his friend David, and works to protect and rebuild Saul’s reputation. With Jonathan testifying in the court of public opinion, both David’s and Saul’s reputations rise. With Jonathan, all the people getting fat on choice morsels of gossip are going to starve to death!

How do we compare? In the court of public opinion, we tend to believe what we want to believe. We tend to believe witnesses in the court of public opinion who agree with our side. We tend to *not* believe those whose testimony contradicts our pre-conceived prejudices. Truth, protecting reputation, and the like are far from our concerns. We want the juicy stuff!

The most obvious breaches of this commandment are when we tell lies or half-truths about people. But gossip isn’t just telling tales, it can be about telling the truth too. When we blab what is spoken in confidence, we betray our neighbor. When we repeat the even mildly scandalous truth about other people simply for a topic of conversation, we sin. This is a typical day in the court of public opinion: us hearing what we want to hear about people; us saying things mostly to confirm what we already think about someone.

If we really were concerned about others people’s good, would we not more often act like Jonathan? Would we not more often confront people, confront them in respect and in private and say, “Please don’t do the wrong thing here.” Would we not plead that they leave their sinful ways and be reunited with God and with their fellow people? But instead we go about mumbling under our breaths, sharing the gossip at the break table, looking over our shoulder to be sure the one we are talking about isn’t coming.

Oh, if Christ had been that way with us, how would we have fared? Did he not have much more reason to think the worst of us? We have known his sacrifice for us, yet we just can’t help ourselves when our mouth runneth over. Jesus may have died for all, but there are some we just can’t imagine why Jesus would do that for them! In spite of the fact that Jesus, as that beloved Easter hymn sings, “lives to plead for me above,” in spite of that we go at each other like cats chewing the fur off each other. Jesus still regrets nothing he has ever done for us, he continually pleads to God the Father on our behalf, “Father, yes, they are stubborn, but I have paid it all. Forgive them. Forgive them.”

Listen to the Apostle Peter tie Christ keeping the Eighth Commandment to our salvation: *“Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. ‘He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.’ When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly”* (1 Peter 2:21-23).

May Christ’s great love for all and his patience with all, inspire us to stop our mouths mid-sentence and do the sort of thing Jonathan did. Let us defend others’ reputations. Let us respect others, even when they fall into sin. Let us, like Jonathan with his father, not only direct others on a right course, but even act on the assumption that they *will* be won over and listen.

Look at the harvest of righteousness that followed Jonathan: Saul ***“listened to Jonathan and took this oath: ‘As surely as the Lord lives, David will not be put to death… and David was with Saul as before.”***

So, today, in the court of public opinion, how has it been? Was there some gossip, character assassination, judging of motives, going on over the morning coffee? Ah, so it is with us fallen sinners. We fall so easily into sin, and seem to savor it as much as gourmet cooking. But we real sinners have a real Savior. This morning you have confessed your sins, your unworthiness to be loved by God. God has again repeated his message of forgiveness. And now God sends us out, under his grace.

In our battle against our own sinful nature that always prefers to chew on the tasty morsels of gossip, we must know the enemy. In our much vaunted and overhyped Information Age, people make all sorts of unsupported accusations, misrepresentations, and assumptions of the worst, and teach us to do the same. What I am saying is that our modern way of communication encourages, facilitates, and rewards behavior that is contrary to the 8th Commandment. What I am saying is that, without our realizing it, our modern methods of sharing information tend to program us to act in ways that run contrary to God’s will.

As God’s people, we need to realize these dangers, the things that war against our faith. When you hear the news anchor or the talk show host or see the latest shared link, you need to ask yourself questions like, “Why is this person telling me this? What does this person want me to think about another person? Do I, after hearing this news, still think well of the other person? Do I want to pray for them?” If we are going to be God’s people making a difference in the court of public opinion, we need to de-program quite a bit of how the world has taught us to think about other people.

And now, in the court of public opinion, how is it going to be? I pray that you will live out the meaning of the Eighth Commandment, “We should fear and love God that we do not tell lies about our neighbor, betray him, or give him a bad name, but defend him, speak well of him and take his words and actions in the kindest possible way.” Think especially of those last golden words: “take his words and actions in the kindest possible way.” If we do no more than that, wouldn’t the court of public opinion be a very different place? Amen.