

What's the Value Behind the Laws?

Scripture Background

This information isn't meant to be read aloud, but as background for the leader. If helpful, share some of it in conversation with the group.

All three readings today focus on wisdom, commandments, and “the Law,” which Jesus’ listeners understood as the collection of Jewish teachings about how to be in right relationship with God, self, and others. Today when we think of the commandments found in the Old Testament, we often reduce them to lists of “thou shalt” and “thou shalt not.” In fact, they were complex teachings developed over thousands of years. They passed on a way of living with love, compassion, and kindness that honored God, self, and every other living being. They set before people the choice between “life and death, good and evil.” Sirach, St. Paul, and Jesus all encourage us to choose goodness and life when confronted with hard choices.

Opening Prayer

Pray the following aloud together, beginning with the Sign of the Cross:

+ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

God of Light and God of Darkness,
thank you for this chance to slow down and listen to your Word for us.

Open our eyes, ears, minds, and our hearts
so that we experience how you are alive and active in our lives today.

We ask this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Scripture Reading: Matthew 5:17-37

Ask someone to read this passage aloud, then pause for a minute of silence.

Ask: What struck you about this reading or the liturgy this week?

Allow for sharing. Move on to the next section once the sharing has died down.

Reflections on the Reading

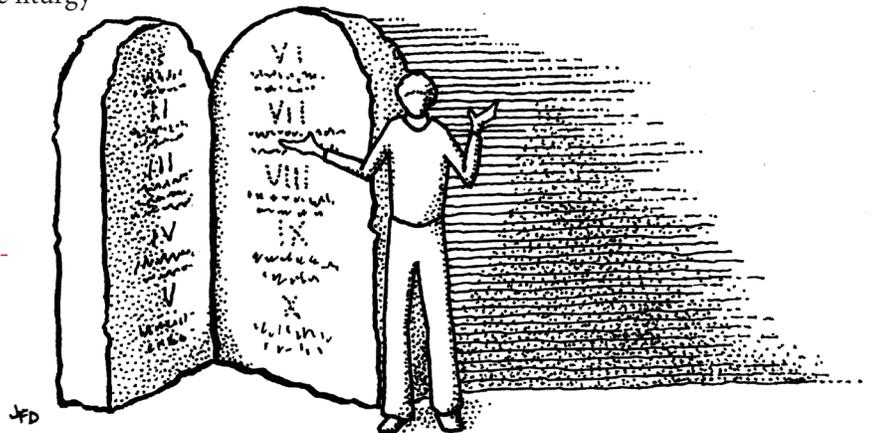
Invite each person in the circle to read one paragraph aloud:

This long excerpt from the Sermon on the Mount demonstrates both how thoroughly

February 15, 2026 • Year A

6th Sunday in Ordinary
Time

- ▶ Sirach 15:15-20 • Our free will
- ▶ 1 Corinthians 2:6-10 • True wisdom
- ▶ Matthew 5:17-37 • The old Law and the new



Jewish Jesus was in his understanding of the world, and also how radical he was in his interpretation of Jewish laws. Matthew makes it clear that Jesus has great respect for his religious tradition; he has not come to throw out Jewish teachings and start a new religion. He has come to shed light on ancient teachings and to challenge people to look for and embrace the spirit behind the letter of the law.

Jesus calls out the scribes and the Pharisees, who have gotten so caught up in trying to win their salvation and the favor of others by obeying the rules perfectly that they have lost sight of the original intent behind them. The Pharisees and scribes aren't alone in their vice—there are some people in every religion who get off track in this way. Jesus wants his listeners to look deeper than the laws themselves. What is the value they are trying to uphold? How are they offering life, and a fuller life, to those who would follow them?

For example, most of us can (thankfully) avoid murdering another human being, but none of us escapes being angry at others. Jesus is pointing out that we need to look at the root of our behavior (anger and lust in this passage) to see where we are imprisoned. Anger, without murder, still imprisons us and the person we are angry with. Lust, even without adultery, does harm to our most intimate relationships. So let's not let ourselves off the hook like the Pharisees just because we seem to have our acts together on the surface. Let's look for where we can invite in more freedom, compassion, and graciousness—for our sake and for the sake of everyone we are in relationship with.

Questions for Discussion

Read each question aloud, one at a time, followed by time for sharing.

- ① What most stands out for you in this Gospel reading today? Why?
- ② The commandments that Jesus mentions aren't arbitrary rules handed down on from on high just to make our lives harder. They invite us to greater freedom. Share an example of how following a teaching from the Bible has made your life better or richer in some way, even if it was difficult.
- ③ Jesus uses hyperbole when saying, "if your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out..." This is not meant literally, but is a metaphor emphasizing that we must give up whatever leads us to sin. Share an experience of giving up something in your own life which ultimately led to greater freedom.

Closing Prayer

Pray the following aloud together:

Lord, may what we have heard and reflected on today inspire us to go out from here to be better disciples in our daily lives.

May we be a blessing to all those we encounter this coming week. Amen.