

February 12, 2017
Sixth Sunday After the Epiphany

“What’s Okay”

Matthew 5:21-37

When we talk about heroes of the Christian faith a name that never pops up is Jason Bourne. Why? Because Jason Bourne is a fictional super soldier. For those of you who aren’t familiar with the Jason Bourne movies, Jason Bourne is a soldier who through extensive programming and training lost his personality and became this fighting machine that, no matter how many agents, police and other adversaries are sent to defeat him, he always escapes. They never catch him. Sometimes he even wins the battles but the war always continues because, well, sequels make money.

I bring up Jason Bourne because we have this label we use for all of us Christians who together are struggling to live out the gift of saving faith in our lives; we are The Church Militant. Why The Church Militant? Because every day is a battle against temptation and sin. Baptized into Christ’s death to sin and resurrection to new and perfect life, we are both saint and sinner all at once. And each day is a fight against the sinful inclinations of the flesh in an attempt to live out our new reality of holiness in the Spirit.

So when it comes to being The Church Militant, I want to be Jason Bourne. I want to escape every temptation, triumph over every sin in my life and send the devil running in the face of my ninja skills of holiness.

That sounds kind of silly, but it’s no more extreme than what Jesus says. *“If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.”*

That is some really scary stuff. Of course, it is hyperbole, exaggeration, but it’s pretty intense hyperbole. It sounds like I’m supposed to be a Jason Bourne when it comes to fighting sin and temptation; blasting the evil out my life and beating all challengers. But I’m not a Jason Bourne. I’m more of...Mr. Bean. You know Mr. Bean, the clumsy Englishman who can’t even do the simplest of tasks correctly. No matter how hard he tries, he’s a screw up. And I think most, if not all of us, can look at an area of our life where we repeatedly slip into sin despite our best efforts, and we don’t feel the The Church Militant. We’re Mr. Bean; The Church Incompetent.

I’m here today to tell you that’s okay...and it’s not.

The sin is not okay. I mean, read this whole section here. Jesus goes even farther than the Ten Commandments. You can’t divorce even a train wreck of a marriage. You can’t even entertain lust in fantasy. You can’t even be angry at a brother or sister in the faith—even if they deserve it! Jesus does not give us any wiggle room here! All sin—actual committed sin or just a lack of love toward God and neighbor in your heart—all sin is damnable! Don’t do it. Be the saint God has made you!

But we still sin. The Mr. Bean sinner in us trips over the shoelaces of his own sinful nature, falls headlong into the temptation of the world and stupidly listens to the lies of Satan. We seem to lose battle after battle every day.

But that’s okay, because we have better than Jason Bourne on our side. We have Jesus Christ who has faced every battle, every temptation of the flesh, and withstood them. Moreover,

by His cross and resurrection He not only wins those battles, but He has also won the whole shooting match. He is victorious in the war!

Baptized into Jesus and living by God's grace in faith, our enemy is shooting blanks! Even though we are Mr. Bean screw ups in resisting temptation, the accusation of sin against us stands robbed of any power to condemn us, because that sin has already been condemned in Christ.

But we must be very, very wary because the enemy is crafty. While the truth stands that we are okay, forgiven in Christ; the enemy and our own self wants to convince us that this means the sin is okay also.

That's what Jesus is talking about here. The Jews had convinced themselves divorce was fine, so long as they did the paperwork correctly. They believed they could be righteously angry and unforgiving when someone had done them wrong and it was okay. They thought they could objectify women, despise the poor, and pretty much care only about themselves so long as they avoided the "really bad" sins and went through the motions at the temple.

All they were really doing was getting comfortable with sin; making an alliance with greed and coddling unloving hearts which stood in opposition to God's perfect design of love of God and neighbor.

In the Jason Bourne movies there is always the other side that has two faces: the evil guys who want Bourne dead because he is foiling their plans, and the not so evil CIA and secret agent types who are just doing their jobs, but still working unwittingly with the evil types. But they're all opposed to Jason Bourne.

What Jesus is making clear here is that you cannot make accommodation for sin in your life. If you do, you run the risk of finding yourself comfortably on the wrong side of the war; the side Jesus has already beaten. "*It is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.*" That's pretty straightforward.

Cut the sin out of your life. As a poor, miserable sinner you will look like an incompetent Mr. Bean flubbing it up left and right; battles will be lost. But that's okay, because you're battling along with the Christ into whom you have been baptized. In Christ, it's all victory! In Christ you are holy, righteous and victorious. In Christ you can recall your baptism, taste His very presence on your lips in His supper, hear His Word of forgiveness and consolation in the absolution and know, despite your failures, it's okay.

But look around your life. Is there a sin—probably a regular practice of sin—with which you are comfortable? Are you looking at that sin and saying, "It's okay." It's not. It's dangerous. It's damning. It needs to go. Jesus doesn't pull any punches about that. Cut it out.

It may be a life-long battle to do so. Some days it may seem like you're Mr. Bean versus the entire army of darkness. It doesn't matter. You're fighting in faith and thus you're fighting in Christ.

The war has been decided on His cross and from His tomb Jesus is the last man standing. He has called you to Himself. Stand with Him in your battles. Victory is yours in Him. It's okay. Amen.