Standing...

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in Your sight O Lord, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sitting...

We are in the season of the Church—Ordinary Time as it’s called, where we pay special attention to Christ’s teaching,

“Your righteousness,” Jesus says, “must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees.”
That had to have sounded like a clap of lighting.

These scribes and Pharisees were engaged in spiritual exercises 24/7/365.
Their righteousness was evidenced by the way they wore their hair, the clothes they wore, the food they ate—and did not eat, their walking down the street and everything they said.
They were the paragons of virtue...
Examples of righteousness to everyone.
“Exceed them,” Jesus says,
“in order to get into heaven.”

Jesus calls for perfect righteousness—
utter sinlessness—complete obedience to God’s law, not just externally...
but complete obedience in thought, word and deed.
For this...is what earns a place in the kingdom of heaven.

Now beloved, this—this is something I cannot do—neither can you.
We could if we were back in the Garden of Eden, before the Fall—but that ship has sailed.
Original Sin has infected us
turning us into people who by nature,
trust in ourselves first,
who look out for our own interests first,
people who easily find fault in others, and in God,
but who imagine ourselves to be righteous—
or at least, righteous enough.

This is why Jesus preaches the way He does...
so that we would hear the Law—in this case the Fifth Commandment,
hearing that it does not deal only with the external act of murder,
but there’s an inward righteousness tied to it.
I mean, to us, the Fifth Commandment
seems to be the easiest commandment to keep—
“I’ve never murdered anyone!”
And my guess is, neither have you.
So, check it off and move on.
But not so fast...

You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.

The Fifth commandment doesn’t just forbid murder—
it instructs the heart and lips as well.
Specifically, what we think and say about our neighbor.
Those harmful words, and thoughts we use all the time,
according to Jesus—
are forms of murder in God’s sight.

Think about all those times when someone has wronged you,
sinned against you, more times than not in the slightest of ways,
and you obliterate them with your thoughts and words...
Put the best construction on them? Please—not on your life!
It’s more like worst deconstruction.
And you’re perfectly content.
Insult is murder.
Anger is murder.
Ergo, you are a murderer.
And if that is how you fare with what is thought to be the “easiest” commandment to keep, how will it be with the rest of them?

Jesus’ interpretation of the Law makes it far more penetrating and dreadful than it had become. And when it’s held before our eyes—we’re convicted, confessing, “I have not kept the Law.” “I have sinned.” “Who can live like this?!”

We despair—because there’s no way we can achieve this righteousness.

What’s Jesus’ point?
You need the righteousness of Another—One who works a righteousness entirely outside of you, for you.

And there is only One Person in the history of the world who could stand before the judgement of the Law and not be condemned.

So, for you who desperately need righteousness, Jesus says, “Look to Me, I have all you need.”
For His is the only righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees—whom He called white-washed tombs.
And His is the righteousness you have...

Through your baptism you first put on Christ as a garment of righteousness, through faith. But it doesn’t end there...
Jesus pours His righteousness out to you through the lips of the faithful pastor who absolves you and preaches the cross into your ears.
Jesus pours out His righteousness for you—the very cup of salvation given and shed for you for the forgiveness of all your sins.
And when you die, we’ll cover your casket with a white pall to show everyone who comes to your funeral that you were clothed in the righteousness of Christ, no doubt entering into the kingdom of heaven.

So now, made righteous in God’s sight,
the Holy Spirit has made you into something new—a new creation. Thus when we return to the Commandments—we see them now not as a mirror but as a guide, not to learn how to enter the kingdom of heaven, but to learn how children of heaven think, speak and act toward our neighbor.

And when it comes to those who wrong us—what do we do? We love and do not hate. We bless and do not curse. We pray and do not gossip. We serve and do not neglect. This is a righteousness that comes from faith. Tough to do? Sure—but we pray for the Lord’s help to soften our conscience. We pray for the Holy Spirit to dwell with us and teach us what it means to be gentle and kind and caring, asking the Lord for wisdom. This is not complete in this life, and sometimes gets messy. But it’s genuine, and we keep working together with the Holy Spirit—striving to be righteous like Christ calls us to be.

In the Holy Name of Jesus, Amen.

**Standing**...And now may the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.