

Sunday, September 13, 2009

**Matthew 5.38-48
Who is my neighbor? Who is my enemy?
SWCOB 9.13.09**

“Three boys sat in their school yard bragging about their fathers.

The first boy says,

‘My father scribbles a few words on a piece of paper,
He calls it a poem, they give him \$50.’

The second boy says, ‘That’s nothing.

My Dad scribbles a few words on a piece of paper,
He calls it a song, they give him \$100.’

The third boy says, ‘Oh yea? Well,

My Dad scribbles a few words on a piece of paper,
He calls it a sermon,
And it takes eight people to collect the offering!’”

(Thanks to Bob Bradshaw)

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This one comes from “Lite Fare” from the Christian Reader:

“One Sunday a minister preached on “turning the other cheek.”

The sermon got the undivided attention,
Of two small boys.

The minister stressed that no matter what others do to you,
We should never try to “even the score.”

Later that afternoon,
The youngest of the two boys,
Ran into the room where their mother sat.

Between sobs he told his mother,
He had kicked his brother.
And his brother had kicked him in return.

“I’m sorry he hurt you,
But you shouldn’t go around kicking people,”
The mother said.

To which the tearful brother replied,
“But the minister said he isn’t supposed to kick me back!”

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Speaking of retaliation,

The 20th century was the bloodiest in human history.

In the book, *Humanity: A Moral History of the 20th Century*, Jonathan Glover estimates that, 86,000,000 people died in wars, From 1900-1989.

According to R. J. Rummel's *Statistics of Democide*,

In addition to those killed in war, Government-sponsored genocide and mass murder, Killed approximately 120,000,000 people in the 20th C.

Perhaps more than 80,000,000 in the former Soviet Union, And communist China alone.

(Ron Sider, "Courageous Nonviolence")

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This is the sixth sermon on The Sermon on the Mount.

Today we are confronted with the fifth and sixth, Set of contrasting statements from Jesus.

Jesus begins with a law found in the Old Testament.

**You have heard that it was said,
An eye for an eye, and tooth for tooth.**

This law was put in place to compensate the victim,
Who had been injured.

This law was also put in place to protect the accused.

For the law limits the punishment,
No *more* than an eye for an eye.

This law makes common sense.

In Leviticus 24.17-20 it states,

**If anyone takes the life of a human being,
He must be put to death.**

**Anyone who takes the life of someone's animal,
Must make restitution—life for life.**

**If anyone injures his neighbor,
Whatever he has done must be done to him.**

**Fracture for fracture,
Eye for eye, tooth for tooth.**

**As he injured the other,
So he is to be injured.**

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In another passage from Deuteronomy 19.21, Moses states,

**Show no pity,
Life for life, eye for eye,
Tooth for tooth,
Hand for hand,
Foot for foot.**

You and I can agree, this law makes common sense.

However, Jesus responded,

**But I say to you . . .
If someone strikes you on the right cheek,
Turn to him the other also.**

The law had made common sense.

Now Jesus is saying something quite radically different.

~~

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches as clearly as he can.

He uses no metaphors,
No parables,
No anecdotes,
And few illustration to make his point.

He wants his listeners to understand, and to understand clearly,
That to follow him,

They must embrace his characteristics.

What Jesus says here is not difficult to understand;
Perhaps difficult to accept but not to understand!

Common sense, however, dictates something else, not this!

To turn the other cheek doesn't seem reasonable,
To give the coat as well doesn't seem logical,
To go the extra mile certainly isn't fair,
And it's certainly not human nature.

And that's precisely the point!

These teaching are not natural,
They are supernatural.

Because they are of God, not human beings.

Our own human response is like that of the Old Testament;
Wrongs have to be justly punished.
But Jesus says not necessarily,
Turn the other cheek,
Give him your coat,
Go the extra mile!

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The disciples were anticipating a Messiah,
Who would arrive on the scene,
Leading an insurgency against the Romans Empire.

That's what they were expecting.

But what they got was a Messiah who taught that love,
Was greater, stronger, and more powerful a weapon,
Than any sword, spear, gun or bomb.

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Nowhere in the New Testament can one argue successfully,
That Jesus considered the use of violence an acceptable response.

Some would say that he willingly submitted to death on the cross,
Because that was a part of God's plan.

I would agree.

But if this was not the way that his disciples should also behave,
He would have told them so.

He said to them,

**Anyone who does not take his cross and follow me,
Is not worthy of me (Mt. 10.38).**

He says this not once but four times in the Gospels!

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Some would say that his action in the Temple,
When he turned over the money-exchangers' tables,
Showed Jesus used violence.

But nowhere in the text does it state
That he actually harmed or hurt anyone.

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Some would say that his comment,

Do not think I have come to bring peace to the earth,

I have not come to bring peace but a sword
(Matthew 10.34),

Justifies violence.

If you read the full passage,
You will conclude that he uses the word sword,
Metaphorically.

Jesus was teaching that following him,
May divide even family members;
Those who believed the gospel,
From the ones that didn't.

When Jesus sent out his disciples two by two,
He told them not to carry even a staff,
Much less a sword.

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**You have heard that it was said,
'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy'**

**But I tell you; Love your enemy
And pray for those who persecute you.**

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Who is my neighbor?
Who is my enemy?

G. K. Chesterton makes the observation that:

"The Bible tells us to love our neighbors
And also to love our enemies;
Probably because they are generally the same people."

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A Sunday school teacher
Was discussing the Ten Commandments
With her five and six-year-olds.

After explaining the commandment to
'Honor thy father and thy mother,'
She asked,

'Is there a commandment that teaches us
How to treat our brothers and sisters?'

Without missing a beat, one little boy answered,
'Thou shall not kill!' (Thanks, Bob Bradshaw)

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According to the Old Testament,

A neighbor was a fellow Israelite.

And an enemy is anyone other than an Israelite.

But according to Jesus,
 There is no line to be drawn between,
Neighbor and enemy.

Our response to both of them is the same,
We are to love them.

~~

I quote from Thomas Merton,

“Do not be too quick to assume that your enemy is a savage,
Just because he is your enemy.

Perhaps he is your enemy because he thinks you are the savage.

Or perhaps he is afraid of you,
Because he feels you are afraid of him.

And perhaps if he believed you are capable of loving him,
He would no longer be your enemy.
Do not be too quick to assume your enemy,
Is an enemy of God,
Just because he is your enemy.

Perhaps he is your enemy precisely,
Because he can find nothing in you,
That gives glory to God.

Perhaps he fears you because he can find nothing,
In you of God’s love,
And God’s kindness,
And God’s patience and mercy.

Do not be too quick to condemn the man,
Who no longer believes in God.

For it is perhaps your own coldness and avarice,
And mediocrity and materialism,
And sensuality and selfishness,
That has killed his faith.”

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There is a story published in the Canadian Mennonite,
By Stanley Green.

“A South African woman sat in the courtroom,
 Listening to white police officers,

Acknowledge the atrocities they had done,
In the name of apartheid.

Officer van de Broek
Acknowledged his responsibility in the death of her son.

Along with others,
He had shot the 18-year-old son at point blank range.

He and the others partied while they burned his body,
Turning it over and over on the fire,
Until it was reduced to ashes.
Eight years later,
Van de Broek and others came to seize her husband.

A few hours later,
Shortly after midnight,
Van de Broek came to fetch the woman.

He took her to the woodpile,
Where her husband lay bound.

She was forced to watch as they poured gasoline
Over his body and ignited the flames that consumed his body.

The last words she heard her husband say were,
“Forgive them.”

Now van de Broek awaited judgment at,
South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Before sentencing, the judge asked her what she wanted.

“I want three things,” she said calmly:

“I want Mr. van de Broek
To take me to the place where they burned,
My husband’s body.

I want to gather up the ashes,
And give him a decent burial.”

“Second, Mr. van de Broek,
Took all my family from me,
And I still have a lot of love to give.

Twice a month, I would like him to come to the ghetto,
And spend a day with me so I can be a mother to him.”

“Thirdly, I would like Mr. van de Broek,
To know that he is forgiven by God,
And I forgive him too.

I would like someone to lead me to where he is seated,
So that I can embrace him,
And he can know my forgiveness is real.”

As the elderly woman was led across the courtroom,
Mr. van de Broek fainted, overwhelmed.

Someone began singing “Amazing Grace.”
And gradually everyone joined in.

This woman understood that to be reconciled to God,
And to be reconciled with neighbors and enemies,
Is to be free indeed.”

~~

**You have heard that it was said,
‘Eye for eye, tooth for tooth,**

**But I tell you,
Do not resist an evil person,
If someone strikes you on the right cheek,
Turn to him the other also.**

**You have heard that it was said,
‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy
But I tell you: Love your enemies,
Pray for those who persecute you.’”**

Jesus died for all, period, full stop.

And in his death we find,
Life conquering death,
Forgiveness conquering retribution,
And love conquering evil.

God made no distinction in whom His Son, Jesus, died for.

He died for you,
He died for me,
He died for your neighbor,
He died for our enemy.

God makes no distinction whom His Son, Jesus, died for
Nor should we.

Who is our neighbor?

Who is our enemy?

In God's eyes, there all the same!
And our response to them should be the same.