

Matthew 5.38-48  
Get Even Better  
WRCOB 6.30.24

There's a story about a Brethren  
Who purchased a farm.

His neighbors told him he made a big mistake.

For the farm adjoined another farm  
Owned by a notoriously mean-spirited man.

In fact, the previous owner sold the farm  
Because of a land dispute  
Over a fence not properly placed.

The brother told the neighbors, "I'll kill him!"

They looked at him disbelievingly.

You're Brethren! You're a pacifist!  
How can YOU say that?

The brother replied, "I'll kill him with love."

No sooner had the brother moved onto his farm  
Than the neighbor came over complaining  
The fence had to be moved.

They went out to the line fence  
And the brother asked his neighbor  
Where he thought the fence should be.

The neighbor set some stakes  
As to where he contended the property line was.

It moved the property line approximately  
Two feet onto the brother's farm.

The brother had no problem with it  
In fact, insisted they set it two feet further in.

He wanted his neighbor completely satisfied.

When the neighbor saw the brother's character  
And saw that he was ready to give him more  
Than what was asked

His attitude changed and he said  
We'll just leave the fence where it is.

The Brethren farmer followed Jesus' teachings.  
On not resisting an evil doer.

He turned the other cheek  
Gave the shirt off your back  
Went the extra mile.

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We continue our sermon series  
On Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

Of the six, our final two antitheses  
Address the question  
How to respond to injury and insult?

It is in these and other passages  
The historic peace churches adopt pacifism  
As part of their faith and practice.

The Mennonites, Amish, Quakers, and Brethren  
Clearly saw pacifism and nonresistance  
As central in a response to violence.

But let's use a word other than pacifism  
For as David Brunk says

*The word pacifism sounds too much like passive-ism.*

Let's use the word nonviolence.

A book recently published, entitled  
Routledge Handbook of Pacifism and Nonviolence  
Explains the difference.

*Pacifism is typically used in a narrow sense to mean  
opposition to war, while nonviolence typically  
describes a method and a means, and in some cases  
a virtue or even a way of life.*

That's what Jesus calls his followers to  
A life that loves both friend and enemy.

G.K. Chesterton is quoted as saying

*The Bible tells us to love our neighbors, and also to  
love our enemies; probably because generally they  
are the same people*

These particular teachings of Jesus  
Are, by far, the toughest  
Most misunderstood  
Least followed.

And yet, Jesus isn't playing around.

He means it.

He's not saying  
This is how it will be in heaven  
Where everyone loves everyone else.

No!

Jesus is saying that, in this world  
People are going to hate you.  
And you're going to want to hate them back.

And he says, don't do it.  
Love them, pray for them instead.

Crazy right?

Anyone here got this teaching down?  
Me neither  
It's still in the development stage.

To do what Jesus is telling us to do  
Requires a conscious everyday act of intentionality

I will not respond in anger  
I will count to ten and breathe deeply

I will say something disarming and positive.  
I will love this person.

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Tim Suttle, pastor at Redemption Church  
In Kansas City asks

*Out of all the possible factors, physical attractiveness, IQ, personality type, socio-economics, race, fashion sense, what would you guess is the number one factor that will determine whether or not you like another person?*

THE number one factor is, IF THEY LIKE YOU.

Really!

Like when you know somebody  
But only in passing.

And someone comes along and tells you  
That this person admires you.

Wow! All of a sudden you feel good  
Hey, this person has good taste, I like them.

By the same logic, the other is just as true.

The number one factor in not liking somebody  
Is if you know that they don't like you.

If they tell others they think you're a doofus  
We immediately dislike them.

It's a way to protect ourselves.

Hate tries to cover up hurt.

It's human nature, but it's not God's nature.

God is love.

God loves people

Who love him and don't love him.

God loves people who shout

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

And God loves people who shout, crucify.

God loves those who kiss him

And those who spit on him.

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Jesus knows our inability to love as he loves.

He knows that our failure to love as he loves

Is at the heart of the violence in our communities

### **Luke 19:41-42 NIV**

**<sup>41</sup> As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it <sup>42</sup> and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes.**

We have in our very nature the inability to get along!

Human nature tells us

To love only those who love us back.

But what does Jesus say about that?

**Matthew 5:46-47 NLT**

**<sup>46</sup> If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. <sup>47</sup> If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that.**

Richard B Gardner in the Believers Commentary  
Writes

*To love only when it pays off, or to greet only our kind, is to love as the world loves. But to love without limit, offering peace even to those who threaten and oppose us, is to love as God loves.*

We love like God when we make no distinction  
Between neighbor and enemy.

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An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.

You've heard the expression

I don't get mad, I get even?

But have you heard the expression

I don't get even, I get one better?

Well, that's what this OT law was all about.

The law had a two-fold purpose.

It gave retribution and compensation  
To an injured individual.

But it also placed limits  
On just how much retribution  
Could be demanded as compensation.

It had to be appropriate to the crime committed.

An eye for an eye, no more, no less.

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Suttle tells the story about a mom and two young kids.

They were playing in the LR  
While mom cooked dinner in the kitchen.

The five-year-old suddenly screams.

She runs in and asks what's happening.

The five-year-old tells her mom  
That her younger brother pulled her hair.

“And it really hurts!”

“Baby,” the mother says, “I’m sorry.

“Your brother doesn’t know how much that hurts”

A little while later, mom hears her son scream.



The five-year-old daughter yells, "He does now!!"

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This, "get even", kind of response to injury  
Is slowly destroying us.

We will slowly kill each other off.

The next big extinction might be humankind.

The Rev Dr Martin Luther King, Jr  
A great mentor to all  
Who claim nonviolence as the way of Jesus

Says it best in his sermon, "Loving Your Enemies"

*Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper  
darkness to a night already devoid of stars.*

*[We] must see that force begets force, hate begets  
hate, toughness begets toughness. And it is all a  
descending spiral, ultimately ending in destruction for  
all and everybody.*

*Somebody must have sense enough and morality  
enough to cut off the chain of hate and the chain of  
evil in the universe. And you do that by love.*

If we continue to follow the code "an eye for an eye"  
The world will become blind

There'll be no end to the vicious cycle of violence.

The only way to end it is to  
Turn the other cheek  
Go the extra mile  
Give the extra cloak  
Move the fence over two more feet  
Take up the cross and follow Jesus.

**Matthew 5:44 CEB**

**But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who harass you**

Love breaks the vicious cycle of violence

Love doesn't need to get even or to get one better  
Love wants to "get even better".

When we hate, we lose the ability to reconcile.

But when we love, the spirit of redemption is at work.

Because love is relational redemption.

*Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that (Martin Luther King Jr.)*

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The Sermon on the Mount

Especially the teachings on loving our enemies

Challenges us to live a life of nonviolence and love  
Even when we are hurt or wronged.

We are called, to rise above our human instinct  
To retaliate and instead choose love  
Even when it's hard.

This is not passive pacifism  
But an active choice to be better

To move the fence two feet further in  
To give more than what's asked  
To break the cycle of hate with love.

Love has the power to transform  
Not just our own hearts  
But the hearts of those who hate us.

It's the only way to truly break the cycle of violence  
And hatred that is destroying our world.

Let's choose to live out Jesus' radical love  
Knowing that it is the only way to bring light  
Into a world shrouded in darkness.

May we all strive to be better  
To love our enemies  
And to be instruments of reconciliation  
In a world desperate for peace.

This is God's love in action.