



October 26, 2014-St. Andrews Sunday
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The Revolutionary Disciple: Authentic Love Matthew 5: 38-48

If we disciples pay attention to what Jesus has said so far in the Sermon on the Mount, we realize it is revolutionary because it is all about the heart... not just external behaviors. It is not enough that we don't commit murder. Jesus burrows into the heart and says, "My disciples don't nurse grudges." Not enough that we don't commit adultery. He burrows into our heart and says, "My disciples don't cultivate lust." Not enough that we have a good reason to get divorced. He burrows into our hearts and says, "My disciples fight for their marriages because they are sacred." And that's just chapter 5! If your heart is truly surrendered to Christ, you will behave in a way that is revolutionary in today's culture.

We are the culture that gets even when we are offended... the culture that hands out condoms to students because they can't control their sexual urges. The culture that trades spouses like used cars... that looks for loopholes to get out of contracts. The idea that disciples of Jesus could live in such a culture as ours and yet forgive grievances, and look away from impure images and stay married to the same person for life, and keep our word regardless... that is revolutionary... counter-cultural. And that is exactly what Jesus expects of us. "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" He asks. It is one of the greatest questions Jesus ever posed.

There is a saying in south: You just moved from preachin' to meddlin'." Well, Jesus is meddling in our lives throughout this entire sermon. We have to decide whether or not he has the right to do so. And what we are going to do about it. And if you thought he was meddling up until now, wait until you hear what's next!

Three weeks ago presbytery was held at First Presbyterian Bakersfield where I served for nine years, so I got to lead our folks on a tour through the building where I spent so much of my life. I cannot walk into the Fireside Room there without remembering one of the most bizarre experiences of my ministry.

I was a rookie Assistant Pastor serving on three different Session committees. On committee night, I moved from meeting to meeting. When I finally arrived at the Christian Ed committee, one of the elders told me he was mad because I was late. I said, "Well, Paul, if you get me off of those other committees, I'll be here on time." And he replied, "Well isn't that just too damned bad" and leaned across the table... and slapped me. He slapped me so hard that the people meeting in the

next room heard it. I jumped up... and he jumped up... and we were nose to nose... and I was shaking. I said, "I ought to put you on the ground." And he said, "Why don't you just try." Amazingly, I resisted the temptation...and stormed out of the room. What I did not say was, "Elder Brown, here's my other cheek. Please sir, may I have another."

Today we move to the most outrageous of Jesus' demands. In Old Testament times, if you were harmed, the customary response was overwhelming vengeance. If someone knocked out a tooth, you might kill him. If someone raped your daughter, you rounded up your friends and wiped out their village. It was a brutal justice. But the Old Testament taught proportionality. If someone knocked out your tooth, you could not kill him. If he poked out your eye, you could not order his village destroyed or his children executed. You could demand his tooth or his eye as payback... but no more. "Eye for an eye" might seem harsh to us, but at the time, it was actually a merciful law of restraint.

But once again, Jesus takes it deeper. "If someone slaps you on one cheek, I know you have the right to slap him back. But don't demand your rights. Throw him a curveball. Let him slap the other cheek, too." But he didn't stop there. Most people in Jesus' time wore two garments, an inner and outer robe. Jesus's said, "If someone steals your outer robe, strip down to your birthday suit and give him the other as well." Or this: Roman soldiers could compel anyone to carry their equipment, but only for a certain distance. Jesus says, "This will blow the soldier's mind. Carry it twice as far as he requires of you."

Jesus is saying, "Listen, I know you have rights, but if you want to be my disciples, one of the things you will learn is to give up your rights." All of this is outrageous: asking for another slap or giving more to a thief or being kind to an oppressor... but then comes the real outrage: "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you..."

This radical teaching of Jesus has provoked some of the most significant social revolutions in human history. Ghandi based his philosophy upon it. So did Martin Luther King. They realized what Israel and Hamas are discovering. You never break the cycle of violence with more violence. But love your enemy?

Revolutionary! But it's more than that. Of all Jesus' radical teachings, enemy-love is the defining quality of the Christian faith. Wasn't it enemy-love that compelled the God to send a savior? "God demonstrates his love toward us in this: while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." What is a "sinner" if not an enemy of God? Was it not enemy-love that drove Jesus to the cross of Calvary? "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

It is true that the world should know we are Christians by our love for each other. But here, Jesus goes deeper. "Even the sleaziest tax collectors love those who

love them back. But you, my disciples, will forgive your enemies. More than that, you will be kind to your enemies. More than that, you will love your enemies!

Now you might have heard someone say, "Ok, I may have to love my enemy. But Jesus didn't say I have to like them." And that misses the point, because what we are really saying is, "I will behave nicely toward my enemy, but I don't have any feelings of kindness or compassion toward them, and I'm not going to cultivate those feelings, either." But isn't that legalism the exact behavior Jesus condemns throughout this sermon? Behave properly on the outside but, on the inside—in the heart—go ahead and seethe and nurture a grudge and harbor awful thoughts. When Jesus loved his enemies, he wept for us! He had compassion on us like a shepherd for his sheep. Enemy-love might start by changing our behavior, but ultimately, Jesus wants to change our hearts.

So here's the question, isn't it. Who is your enemy? Who is the real, flesh and blood person who despises you or harms you or puts you down? What face comes to mind? Is there someone who hates you? And maybe you hate them, too! With good reason... they did you dirt, cheated you, lied about you. Even worse, they abandoned or abused you in some awful way. It is understandable that you would hate them. They are your enemy. That's what you do with enemies. You hate them. You need to hate them in order to dehumanize and destroy them. That's what we do to enemies.

Unless, we are revolutionary disciples of Jesus... then we love our enemies. That is His command. "I know it's hard," Jesus says. "It's easy to love the ones who love you, but I am calling you to the hard thing. I am calling you to love those who hate and mistreat you in the same way that I loved you when you hated and mistreated me." But where do we start? Jesus tells us: prayer. "Pray for those who persecute you." We pray for our enemies and through those prayers, God purges the poison of hatred from our hearts. Through those prayers, we find the courage to treat our enemies with undeserved kindness, and often our feelings begin to follow our actions. You want to love an unlovely person? Treat them with love and your heart will follow.

Are there limits to enemy-love? Yes. It's hard to imagine Jesus telling a wife to return to her abusive husband for more beatings. Or that he would tell the child to return to her sexual abuser. As a matter of fact, once when Jesus was slapped, he did not offer the other cheek; he confronted the man. The Sermon on the Mount is full of extreme teaching that provokes a response to make a point. But Jesus is serious about this revolutionary idea that we should respond to hatred with love. He is serious that—in a culture quick to blame, quick to file lawsuits, quick to retaliate—His disciples should be conspicuous because we withhold blame and offer grace to those who harm or hate us.

Last week I listened to an interview with a man named Dan Bauman. He and a friend went to Iran as an adventure, but on the way out they were arrested and

thrown into a dungeon. They were both held on charges that carried the death penalty. Nearly every day, he was brought to an interrogation room to be beaten by the same man. I want you to listen to part of this interview. (Video; <http://www.cbn.com/tv/1742259055001>)

As a result of that revolutionary act of enemy-love, three guards in that prison became followers of Jesus.

You know, one of the hard things about being a preacher is, you have to preach the message to yourself first. And if you have any integrity, you find yourself grappling with the call of Jesus before you ever pass those words on to your congregation. Over the last two weeks, I have been wrestling with Jesus. First in chapter 5 where he says, "If you are taking an offering to the altar and remember that someone has an offense against you, put the gift down and go make peace with that person." Then, I come to this passage about loving and praying for your enemy. And suddenly, I knew what I had to do. I remembered a person who feels like my enemy. And I'm pretty sure views me in the same way. And I knew I could not preach this sermon without doing something about it. So, in obedience, I wrote a note. I lamented our broken relationship and offered to take a step toward reconciliation, including a face to face meeting at a place of their choice. I had an advisor read the note, and then I sent it.

I have no idea what the response will be. But I meant what I wrote. I lament the brokenness of our relationship and my part in it, and I don't want to be enemies for the rest of our lives. I want God to heal that. So, we will see what He does. Very few here this morning don't have someone who would count as an enemy. Most of us has someone about whom we would say, "Yeah, love your enemy, right... but Jesus didn't know my enemy! He doesn't know what he is asking." Well, he does and he does. He knows your enemy. He knows the bondage of your bitterness. But if you were to obey Him and pray for your enemy and act kindly towards your enemy... who knows how Jesus might use that to change your enemy's heart? And yours?

I cannot tell you what you must do about this. What would be right for one person might be unwise and even dangerous for another. But I can tell you that we are really good at coming up with excuses for disobeying the hard things that Jesus tells us to do. I can't tell you how your enemy will respond to your act of love but I can tell you that if Jesus tells you to do this, it won't be wasted. Even if you don't get the response you hope for, your obedient act of enemy-love will not be wasted.

By the way, would you like to hear the end of my slapping story? Years later, I received a knock on my door here in Gig Harbor. It was Elder Brown. He stood outside, not willing to come in, and said, "That moment I slapped you was one of the worst of my life. I have regretted it ever since. Will you forgive me?" I said, "Of course I forgive you." He fell into my arms and wept and wept. I never saw

him again and he died a few years ago, but it was one of the sweetest and most unlikely moments of restoration I have ever experienced. I wonder though, how hard was it for him to drive up to Gig Harbor and show up on my doorstep, not knowing how I would respond? But he was obedient.

What hard command is Jesus asking you to obey? Maybe there are several of them. That's what happens when we take Jesus seriously. So I'd like to help. If you are on the left end of a pew, please look under and you will find a pile of journals. Take one and pass them down. For the month of November, the Session is calling this congregation to a renewed covenant of discipleship. We are going to read a part of the Sermon on the Mount every day, write down what Jesus is telling us to do and on Covenant Sunday, we are going to make a personal and private covenant with the Lord to be a more faithful disciple. We are also going to fast and pray every Wednesday, and we are going to have a 24-hour chain of prayer, and we are going to come together as a congregation to serve Jesus two Saturdays from now.

In other words, we are going to practice obeying what Jesus commands each of us to do. I realize that some of you aren't that serious about following Jesus. You could just chuck the journal in a basket and go along with your superficial Churchianity. But if you want to be a revolutionary, obedient disciple of Jesus I challenge you to join me in this season of covenant.

On this Sunday, we celebrate our own heritage as a church by remembering those who have gone before us. As you read these names—and as you stand in tribute when your loved one's name appears—remember this: one day, your name will be on this list. Will you be remembered as a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ?

Sermon Questions

- **REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER:** Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.
- **PRAY TOGETHER:** Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.
- **DIG DEEPER**
 1. In some ways, this teaching may be Jesus' most revolutionary. Why?
 2. Who has been evil toward you? Will you share your story? What does Jesus' teaching compel you to do about it?