

*The Seventh Sunday After the Epiphany*  
February 27, 2011  
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Matthew 5:38-48

***"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and 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. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. "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, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (NIV)***

Two weeks ago when many wrote or gave out Valentines I wonder if any Americans made one out to Osama bin Laden to show their love and concern for him. Who loves like this? As our prayers were said before we went to bed last night, I wonder how many prayers were offered on behalf of the bully at school, the annoying neighbor, the co-worker who has it out for us. Who loves like this? I wonder how many of us are ready and willing to go into this day and be mistreated, cut off in traffic or in line, be slandered, cheated, or hurt by others, and then let it roll off our backs without any thoughts of getting even or one iota of revenge on our minds. I wonder how many of us would respond with words & acts of kindness and forgiveness. Who loves like this?

As Jesus continues to place God's holy law before our eyes in this sermon He gave on the mount, it may leave us scratching our heads. I pray it also leaves us searching our hearts. As we focus in on these piercing words of our God, how can any of us study them and not walk away with the question: **Who loves like this?**

*"Don't get mad, get even. What about my rights? I hope he gets what is coming to him one day, and I want to be the one to give it to him."* These cries for revenge, for getting back at the other guy, are not just part of our world today. This vengeful, sinful mindset began at the fall in the Garden. Because it was still evident in Jesus' day, Jesus clarifies what God's law says and doesn't say on this matter. ***"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and 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."***

When Moses wrote about an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, this was God's command saying the punishment should fit the crime. This was addressed to courts and the authorities to punish the evil doers with fair and just punishment according to what they had done. But many Pharisees and teachers of the law began stating this as a formula for personal vengeance which God's Word clearly forbid. Instead, Jesus says when someone strikes your cheek, turn to him the other one also. When you are mistreated don't strike back - it is not for you to get revenge. Please don't misunderstand

there are times we have a duty and right to our family and country and even ourselves to protect and fight against injustice. But Jesus' point is there is no room for personal vengeance.

Jesus adds: "***And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.***" There might be someone out to get the best of you and Jesus says if they want your tunic - give them your cloak as well. The tunic was not nearly as important or expensive as the cloak which was the warmer outer garment. There was even a law Moses gave saying if you borrowed a cloak to return it by night so your neighbor would not get cold. But Jesus says if a person wants it that bad to let him have it. Don't be so concerned about your rights!

The lesson goes on: "***If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.***" Under Roman rule Roman soldiers could grab any citizen or their animal and force them to carry their baggage or cargo. You might recall them grabbing a man named Simon from Cyrene and forcing him to carry Jesus cross. But the law stated they could only make a person go with them for one mile. What a nuisance and bother - the Jews must have hated being forced to do this! Now, Jesus tells them not to just go the mile, but to go an extra mile with them. Help that person even more. And if a person needs something lend it to them.

Still Jesus isn't done. "***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.***" The Bible clearly teaches us to love our neighbor, but no where do the Scriptures say to hate our enemies. That is something they again heard from the teachers of law - it was a rule taught by men. After all, it makes sense doesn't it? Why would we care about an enemy, an adversary, someone who is against us? But that is exactly what Jesus tells us to do. Jesus says to love them. Those who oppress, and harass, and torment you - pray for them. After all Jesus explains: "***If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?***" So show love - even to your enemies.

After listening to Jesus' words here I am left looking at myself in the mirror and seeing someone who doesn't even come close. And I am left asking: who loves like this? Certainly, not me! How about you? Don't you find at times it is difficult to be this kind and forgiving even to your own family and friends? Don't we have a hard time going an extra mile for our own brothers and sisters? How many of you kids would jump at the chance to help your sister clean her room or play the game your brother wants to play or give up the biggest slice of cake without a fight? Aren't there times, even over small things, when we want to get even or get back at those closest to us? Doesn't our prayer life sometimes fall far short of what it could and should be for the family and friends we love? Now, Jesus tells us to love our enemies - to help those who want to hurt us - to spend my valuable time praying for those people who persecute me!

Is this really what God wants from us? Is this truly what God demands? This is exactly what God commands: "***Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.***" God wants us to love our neighbors just as we would love ourselves. Our neighbors would include even our enemies. God wants us to love perfectly. God wants

hearts that love, not hearts filled with anger or with an agenda for personal revenge. So if you have not done this and I have not done this, then what is the answer to our question: who loves like this? The answer of course is the One we call our Father in heaven. He is perfect. He is the One who ***“causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.”*** God gives sunshine and sends the nourishing rains, even for people who snub their noses up at Him. He cares, even for those who deny that He exists. He provides, even for those who brag all that they have comes not from God, but from their own power and strength.

And this perfect Father loves this world so much He does much more than send the sunshine and rain. He does much more than open up His hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing. He went the extra mile to be sure! He gave up His Son! He provided righteousness. He provided forgiveness. He provided salvation. He sent us Jesus. Now when we ask: who loves like this? we look at Jesus and clearly see the answer. Not once did Jesus say *“I’m going to get even and get my revenge”* when He was mistreated. You never heard Jesus complain: *“What about my rights?”* Jesus was always ready to be slandered and cheated and hurt by others if it meant doing the right thing and helping others. Jesus always responded with words and acts of kindness and forgiveness. Jesus always loves like this!

Now think of how Jesus treated His enemies. When Jesus was betrayed by one of His own, by one of His closest and dearest disciples, Jesus still called Judas ***“Friend”*** saying ***“do what you came for”***(**Matthew 26**). As those who hated Him laughed at Jesus and taunted Jesus and mocked Jesus with lies and hateful words as Jesus hung on the cross, Jesus prayed for those who persecuted Him ***“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing”***(**Luke 23**). Jesus loved even His enemies. In fact, think of what Jesus did for us. As Paul writes it Romans ***“Christ died for the ungodly...God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*** When we were God’s enemies we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son. (5) Jesus did not go to the cross for good friends and good people. He went for us. Jesus did not save us from sin and hell because we first loved Him. We were His enemies. But Jesus loved us and saved us by laying down His life for sinners.

Jesus is who loves like this! And now I pray when the question is asked: who loves like this? people might say *“you know those people at Amazing Grace. How do they love like that?”* I pray we are filled with love for God and love for our neighbors. May we pray for even our enemies. May we have the heart of God that wants no one to perish but all to come to faith in Jesus as the one and only Savior. May we repay those who hurt us with words and acts of kindness and forgiveness. May we love like this. After all, because of Jesus, we are now children of the heavenly Father. We are perfect and holy in His sight because the blood of Jesus has washed all our sins away and we wear the righteousness of Christ. So children, although we will not attain it this side of heaven, the standard for our love is set high: ***“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”*** Love like this. Amen.