

Trinity 6, 2020

Turning Hearts

Matthew 5:38-48

St. Andrew's – Jacksonville, OR — By Fr. Bill Baker

“Ye have heard that it hath been said, thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you...”

May we be diligent in the daily reading of Holy Scripture and purposeful in our unceasing prayers. The verses read within our hearing this morning are most profoundly pertinent in the turbulent world we live in today. When you consider the divisions escalating hate at so many levels it becomes evident how far humanity has fallen from grace. Those of us who are here, worshipping together, may feel like we are a minority...a minority who desires to spread love but also fearful that the majority see us as weak and easily overcome. Lawlessness is openly accepted in our streets and immoral crusades are leading the way. A lack of authority and leading as well as indecent and unethical behaviors are chipping away at the solid ground we are striving to protect.

And so the psalmist's question persists...*“If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?”* (Psalm 11:3). What we can do is found in the Gospel of Matthew chapter 5 in the very verses Fr. Chris read to us a few moments ago.

“Ye have heard that it hath been said, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.” How many times have you listened to someone use this verse to justify revenge. This is why scripture reading is so important. This verse is not the beginnings of a tirade on how to get even with someone for a wrong committed. Through Jesus Christ, the God of love is extending to us the same power of **Mercy** provided for us on the Cross. Jesus declares, “Ye have HEARD that it hath been said...an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth” ...ye have ‘heard’, Jesus said. Something is about to change. It is not an eye for and eye. Our Lord wants us to understand that using evil to avenge evil is not a path leading to justification. Equalizing evil through the use of evil only removes the possibility of a

greater good. It is our good intentions that will become evil in themselves when allowed to pursue such paths.

“But I say unto you, our Lord continues, that ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.” Here we are admonished by Christ to not fight evil with evil reactions, but instead to resist by surrendering ourselves to suffering wrongfully, knowing that by submitting as Christ did on our behalf so too will our love, displayed correctly, win the day. We are called to turn the other cheek. The cheek that is struck wants to strike back in the same manner, but there is a better way...turn the “other cheek”...the cheek of righteousness, the cheek of **forgiveness**...the forgiveness of Jesus as he cried out *“forgive them for they know not what they do”* (Luke 23:34). And as we turn the cheek of forgiveness we also turn a new ear, an ear that is able to listen to the deeper depths of pain caused by a world in confusion. We must remain strong in the Lord to continue the healing that began on the Cross. This is what we are called to do.

“And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also.” Here the savior of our souls does not want us to squander our integrity by demoralizing our Christian walks. It is the **grace** of God Almighty that gives so freely what we do not deserve. This same grace must flow through each of us in order to touch hearts calloused by the evils that surround them. If a man accuses you rightfully for a misstep admit it and come clean, he has won your coat. But now is also the time to present to him your cloak...your cloak of admission that your imperfections are equally sinful in God’s eyes as any man’s sins and that it is only through the grace of God found in Jesus Christ that we may obtain the glorious wonders of eternal life! You see, even in our failures the Gospel can be preached. Your honesty (your cloak) expressed to a fallen soul can be the deciding factor for a sinner to become a brother.

“And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.” Now we can go the extra mile. We are reaching for higher ground, promoting the Gospel, unveiling forgiveness and walking in truth. The **sanctification** of a soul involves accepting Christ and growing ever closer to our Father in heaven. When a brother or sister is inclined by you to begin their journey, it is Christ’s love that compels you to go the

extra mile. As they begin the process of sanctification you too are continuing in a maturing of your own sanctification. Walking the extra mile is good for the soul. Pray that you never miss a chance to put on your Jesus shoes and guide a soul home.

And finally, *“Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.”* We have come this far. We have shown mercy, we have reflected the Father’s forgiveness, we have illustrated the grace of God that flows through us and we have helped our brother on the road to recovery through the sanctification of his soul. Now we must continue to provide for the necessities that are required for the journey. *“For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth...”* (Matthew 7:8). God uses our gifts to bless those who ask and those who seek. Our Lord not only wants us to spread the good news of salvation but also wants us to be an active part in the continued cultivation of hearts that seek Him. The needs may be physical: food, clothing, shelter, medical care. And the needs may be spiritual: how to pray, understanding scripture, feeling God’s presence. We must be there for those who find need along the way and be willing to give of ourselves to assist them in their Godly growth.

“Ye have heard that it hath been said, thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you...” ...Why? *“That you may be the children of your Father which is in heaven.”*

Evil avenging evil creates no good...love responding only to love gains no rewards. The challenge is to love those who do not love us and to turn their hearts.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.