**Matthew 5:38-48 (ESV)**

"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' [39] But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. [40] And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. [41] And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. [42] Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you. [43] "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' [44] But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, [45] so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. [46] For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? [47] And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? [48] You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

**“Unreasonable Love Has A Reason”**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. Last week the Sermon on the Mount dealt with brokenness in relationships. Reconciliation is what keeps us right with the Father by faith in His Son as the sacrifice. Just as from this good news in Jesus we have the resolve to love those in our life. However, the ridiculous nature of the Gospel goes far beyond treasuring the relationships we already have. God’s grace is abundant. It extends beyond the natural. This righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisees because it even loves one’s enemy! How is this possible to grasp? We live in a world filled so much hostility and danger. Where is the justice in what Jesus says?

The Son of God is not a pacifist for the government has the authority to promote justice in the world. He said, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesars” (Matthew 22:21). At the same time, the Savior of sinners is not an activist pretending government can conquer every enemy in the world. He said, “You will hear of wars and rumors of wars” (Matthew 24:6). The words spoken about resisting revenge and loving one’s enemy are personal more than dealing with the public judgments of the nations. The savior gave this unreasonable love to His baptized, His disciples, His Church. It does not deny Christians the rite to join the military, to serve as police officers, or for parents to raise their children. It is just the opposite! God’s Son goes beyond the governance of the world to what lies within the heart of every person. Unreasonable love has a reason made right for all in Jesus.

“You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil…” Man by nature will never be satisfied with the government. Just as in Jesus’ time, we like to take matters into our own hands. Revenge is what lashes out in our life to make right what is wrong. This primal urge comes in all shapes in sizes. It can be the growing rage against that bully at school. It can be the lies made up before a court of law to get back at our accuser. It can be in the simple way we tailgate the person who cut us off while driving. Revenge makes us feel good. It seeks justice against the person who hurt us. Of course, there is no justice when we fight fire with fire. To actively engage in such aggression is what our sinful hearts desire. It goes against good order, against rightful authority, and against God. Matter a fact, it shows our spirit of selfishness, lack of respect, and how little faith we have in God.

“You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you…” Where revenge is how we actively engage our enemies, Jesus also describes the way we receive them. This is the attitude by which we look at that person as the “enemy.” It can be in derogatory remarks that have nothing to do with the truth. It can be in drawing the line that denies forgiveness because I have dealt with you for the last time. It can be in unfriendliness where we snub a person for not appreciating us. Jesus holds up the coldness of our hearts at how we see of others. We want those on this side and those on that said, but God declares, “You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.” So in response to the Law, we try to follow proper etiquette towards our enemies and “keep the peace” but our hearts are not in it.

What a blessing it is for God’s unreasonable love to have the reason made right for us in Jesus. No one but the holy God of heaven has the right to take revenge against a sinful world. Yet, how did He go about it? Rather than wrath, the Father sends His Son to go out of His way to give Himself to sinners. When they struck Him, He did not strike back. When they shouted unholy words, He had nothing to say. As the Apostle Peter said, “When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly” (1 Peter 2:23). The Father knew the injustice against His Son. He had His revenge, but it was far different from what we would do. It was not fighting fire with fire, but giving grace upon grace. Instead of revenge upon sinners, God just saved a sinful world by the cross. Rather than, “teaching us a lesson” the Father left His wrath in the suffering and death of His Son. Jesus gave out of love to the enemy. None other would love us by such sacrifice from the heart as God or man.

This unreasonable love poured upon the baptized proclaims salvation upon us. It brings with it a life even now before the Father no longer as enemies, but as His sons and daughters. It is not our right by works for unreasonable love means to receive everything by faith in Jesus. As the Savior, He appealed to the Father praying for His enemies saying, “Father forgive them…” (Luke 23:34). This is what Jesus is still doing for us as the writer from Hebrews states, “He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them (7:25).” This is why our Lord taught His disciples to pray, “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” This is how the Father keeps all righteous before His presence with the perfect work of His Son. Grace upon grace is beyond good government and this life, but a life with the Gospel given by the Word and Sacraments from Jesus. His Kingdom comes to save us from enemies that are much greater than men, but found in forgiving our sins, making death reveal His life, and by removing the power of the Devil. The promise for the Church is as St. Paul said, “If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple.”

Since good news is in Jesus, His Words have new meaning when He says, “You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” This is not perfection for salvation by my life. God has already given righteousness by the cross. Instead, Jesus wants His baptized to go beyond the common respect towards people by the Law. In our country we call it, “inhalable rights.” Yet, in the community of Christ, His Church, we have the right perfected by the Gospel to look upon all people friend or foe with the love God has for them. The disciple Stephen in the book of Acts cried out with this kind of love at his stoning saying, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them” (Acts 7:60). It is this kind of love that had Christians protect the right for Muslims to pray in Egypt, even when the ones they defend brutally attacked them in the past. It is this love that our Lutheran friends in Kenya speak of when they help in disasters only to hear, “Why would you do this for us? We would not do this for you.” God’s love by the Gospel does not diminish the Law, justice, or authority from keeping stability in a sinful world. Unreasonable love goes above the rules to what God makes right for all in Jesus. As Luther says, “When a man is genuinely meek, his heart is pained at every evil that happen to his enemy. Such people are the true children and heirs of God and brethren of Christ, whose heart was pained for all of us on the holy cross” (Plass 463:1364). Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.