

**Sermon for the Epiphany 7 - Matthew 5:38-42 February 19, 2017**  
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(Adapted from sermons.com Epiphany 7 Year a Sermon Illustrations)

Lord, Make me a channel of your peace:  
Where there is hatred, let me bring your love;  
Where there is injury, your healing power  
And where there's doubt, true faith in you. Amen.

Mark Twain once said this about the Bible: "I have no problem with those parts of the Bible I don't understand. It's those parts of the Bible I do understand that gives me fits." The passage that we are going to study certainly fits into that category.

This passage illustrates something I bet most of you have never thought about before. One of the easiest things in the world to do is to become a Christian. It is ridiculously easy. All you have to do is confess you are a sinner, repent of your sin, believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross for your sin and was raised from the dead, and surrender your life to Him as your Lord and Savior; and you become a Christian immediately and instantaneously. There is not an easier thing in the world than to become a Christian. But at the same time, one of the most difficult things in the world is to BE a Christian, and you're going to see that illustrated this morning.

Over the past few weeks we have been reading exclusively from the fifth Chapter of Matthew's Gospel. We began with a sermon on the Beatitudes – the Blessings. Next we heard a sermon reflecting on Jesus calling us, you and me the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Next were four injunctions against Murder, adultery, divorce and swearing oaths. Today's gospel talks about reconciliation – NOT an eye for an eye or a tooth for a tooth and the command to love our enemies. The final verse of today's reading challenges us to be perfect, like our heavenly Father is perfect.

Well, I don't know about you, but in no way can I ever think that anything I do or say is 'perfect'. This is too great a challenge for me and most Christians. However, I don't think Jesus expects us to reach that goal, I think Jesus is calling for us to go beyond what normal human people might do. We've all heard the expression, "Do your duty." Well, the Lord Jesus once again tells us something that no human would have ever thought of.

He is going to tell us, "Do what is not your just your duty," and "Do more than your duty." That is going the second mile. What does this mean?

Be Willing to Get Worse Than You Deserve

Be Willing to Give More Than You Are Asked

Be Willing to Go Farther Than You Are Required

Be Willing to Grant All That Is Needed

We use similar words all the time, especially the word 'honour'.

\*Cub Scouts declare, "On my honour as a Scout..."

\*Soldiers pledge themselves to "Duty. Honor. Country."

\*The fifth commandment (depending on how you count) says "Honour thy father and thy mother."

\*Husbands and wives promise to "Love. Honour. Cherish."

A point of honor is a good thing. Honor points us beyond ourselves and our little orbits. Honor connects us to others. A shared sense of honour creates a common culture.

Our Gospel reading this morning focuses on two aspects of human misbehaviour which does the individual dishonour. Retaliating against someone who has done us wrong and NOT loving our enemies.

Concerning retaliation.

When Kathy and I visited Cape Town, South Africa at Christmas in 2007, we took the boat trip to Robbings Island. This was the jail where Nelson Mandela spent over 25 years incarcerated because of his vocal stand against apartheid. We saw his small jail cell, his bunk and woolen blanket, and then we walked to the limestone quarry where he and fellow political prisoners broke up rocks of limestone. In was in that togetherness that discussions began with these black leaders about what would happen when black people finally got a chance to rule the country of their birth. They talked about Rhodesia which had its name changed to Zimbabwe when black rule took over. White businesses were nationalized, white business and political leaders were jailed without trial, violence and bloodshed broke out and the economy of one of the most productive countries in Africa took a nosedive to the bottom. Same was happening in other white ruled African countries as well. This group of men saw that the only good future for South Africa was uncovering the truth about the

abuses of apartheid and offering forgiveness and reconciliation to the white and Afrikaans community so that together, a new future for South Africa could be attained without revenge or violence. And this is what they did. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission under the Chairmanship of Archbishop Desmond Tutu!

In our own country of Canada, we have expropriated and subjugated our native and aboriginal people. Fortunately, we were not as blood thirsty as our southern neighbours – but we treated these people as third class citizens, depriving them of their human and legal rights. It has only been in the past 2 decades that the Federal and Provincial Governments, and the Churches, have tried to come to terms for the errors of the past, and our own Truth and Reconciliation Commission allowed victims to have a voice, to tell their stories, and to receive some nominal compensation for the loss and abuses they experienced. However, we know a lot more needs to be done. Many of our reserves are like third world countries, no clean water, no sanitation, minimal accessibility to health practitioners, minimal education and opportunities for employment, very high incidents of alcohol and drug use and suicides. A lot more need to be done.

### Love Your Enemy

In a sermon written in a Georgia jail and preached just after the bus protest in Montgomery, Alabama, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said this about loving your enemies: After noting that hate is just as injurious to the hater as the hated, Dr. King says,

"Of course this is not practical; life is a matter of getting even, of hitting back, of dog eat dog... My friends, we have followed the so-called practical way for too long a time now, and it has led inexorably to deeper confusion and chaos. Time is cluttered with the wreckage of communities which surrendered to hatred and violence. For the salvation of our nation and the salvation of mankind, we must follow another way. This does not mean that we abandon our righteous efforts. With every ounce of our energy we must continue to rid this nation of the incubus of segregation. But we shall not in the process relinquish our privilege and our obligation to love. While abhorring segregation, we shall love the segregationist. This is the only way to create the beloved community."

Martin Luther King, Jr., *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, page 596, quoted by Chuck Queen, *Love Your Enemies*

## Going Beyond Duty: The Second Mile

Shortly after the battles ended the American Revolution, but before the peace had been negotiated, George Washington was with his troops in Newburgh, New York. But they began to grow very restless because they hadn't been paid. Washington had begged the Continental Congress to do what they said they would do and pay the soldiers, but they refused.

Well, some of the officers began to organize a rebellion. They talked about marching on Philadelphia, which was at that time the seat of the reigning national government, and overthrowing that government and letting the army rule the nation.

With the fate of America in the balance, George Washington made a surprise appearance before these officers. After praising them for their service and thanking them for their sacrifice, he pulled from his pocket a copy of a speech that he wished to read. But then he fumbled with a paper and finally reached for a set of reading glasses - those men had never seen him wear glasses before. Washington made this simple statement: "I have already grown grey in the service of my country, and now I am going blind."

Historian Richard Norton Smith wrote: "Instantly rebellion melted into tears. It was a galvanizing moment, and the rebellion..." and the rebellion was put down because they had seen before them a second miler. Becoming a Christian is one thing; being a Christian is another one. Every chance you get for the glory of Jesus, for the goodness of others, and because of the grace of God, go the second mile.

James Merritt, Collected Sermons, [www.Sermons.com](http://www.Sermons.com)

So, Be Willing to Get Worse Than You Deserve  
Be Willing to Give More Than You Are Asked  
Be Willing to Go Farther Than You Are Required  
Be Willing to Grant All That Is Needed

### Prayer –

**Lord, surround your people with your presence. Do not let us stretch out our hands to evil deeds, or be destroyed by the snares of the enemy, but bring us to share the land prepared for the saints in light, where you live and reign, God, now and forever. Amen.**