

Theme: **Getting Even through Love**

Text: Matthew 5: 38 – 48

Date: February 19, 2017

Season: 7th Sunday after Epiphany

Place: Shepherd of the Rockies LCMS, Bailey, CO

Grace and peace to you as you mature as a child of God, from God, our Father, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In the winter of 1990 Glenda and I along with our four kids were traveling from my parents' home in Boulder to our home in Fredrick, which usually took about a 30-minutes. This time thou it was different because while we had enjoyed the afternoon with my parents the snow had begun to fall, we left right after supper but before we had gotten out of Boulder we realized that the roads were getting too slick from the snow, so we stopped at a park and ride to put snow chains on our full-size van that we were driving. The snow was coming down so hard that you could hardly see 10 feet in front of you, yet we continued on. We crawled along the Longmont diagonal in a thick cloud and snow when suddenly there was a bright flash of a brilliant blue light and then we could hear thunder. Each time that this happen you could see all the cars that had driven off the road and gotten stuck for a few seconds and then it would get utterly dark again. It was the first time that I had ever been in a thunderstorm in the winter and though the darkness and the snow was scary the lighting lit up the surroundings enough to help you avoid driving off the road and running into other cars that had broken down along the way until we got home. The next morning all the schools were canceled because of the snow and the highways were littered with cars that had gotten stuck on and off the roads. As I look back at that scary and unique experience I'm certain that if there hadn't been lighting that night we too would have been one of those cars that drove off the road and got stuck in that snow storm, because along the way we even saw a snow plow that had driven off the road and gotten stuck. But instead by God's grace we had made it home safely because the lighting in the storm had shown us the way.

How we have all been in thunderstorms or snowstorms that were scary because of the amount of moisture coming down so hard that you couldn't see except for the brilliance of the lighting in the darkness of the storm. We, as God's disciples, are called to be the light in the storms of this world for others. God has given us the light in our lives

by the life, death and resurrection of His Only Son, Jesus Christ, the light of the world, so that we can reflect that light of God's love, grace and mercy to guide others along the path to their heavenly Home through God's Word.

In the last three weeks as we have listen to Jesus speak the words of the sermon on the mount He has told us of the blessings that He will give us through His Word, called us to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world and encouraged us to be in that unique relationship with one another as we hold onto Jesus in our hearts. Today, Jesus says to us, **"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."** (Mt 5: 38 – 42)

Revenge and selfishness come natural to our sinful nature. When someone causes us some form of discomfort we are quick to plot some way of getting even, but that's not the way of God and His perfect love for us, so we need God's help to change our nature. Out of love, grace and mercy, God causes His rain to fall upon the just and the unjust. Out of His radical love, grace and mercy, He shows, calls, and equips each of us to become what we are already are through God's Word, the light of the world and the salt of the earth. Jesus is all about people; even and maybe especially those who are His enemies. For from the time that we followed our free will and fell into the depths of sin we have all been God's enemies. The same enemies that slapped Jesus' face as He was being prepared for His Crucifixion and He did not fight back is each one of us. The same enemies who took His tunic and cloak, but He did not complain or speak angry words against, is each one of us. Yes, we are the same enemies who force Jesus to walk that mile to the cross and then He choice to hang on that cross of Calvary and let the world ridicule Him so that each one of us would be saved from our sins, death and the power of the devil. Yes, even though He could have stopped all that His enemies were doing against Him, He didn't and instead He accomplish all that His Heavenly Father had sent Him to do for us, His enemies, so that we could live in His love now and for all eternity.

God's love, grace and mercy has been given to us so that we can reflect that love, grace and mercy of God to others, so that they too can make it through the storms of this world and make it to the heavenly Home prepared for us all. That's why Jesus says to us, **"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."** (Mt. 5:43-45)

There's an old educational adage that says, "You teach what you know, but you only reproduce what you demonstrate." It seems that Jesus understood this fully, for He is showing us that we are on the kingdom road because of what He taught, but also especially because of what He demonstrated for us and for our salvation. We live, move, and have our being in a time, place, and culture that is decidedly postmodern, post-Christian, and often very anti-church. More and more of us will face not just disinterested and apathetic onlookers to the Christian life, but ungodly and aggressive unbelievers who will rail against the faith we have staked our lives upon. So how are we to deal with such people? How are we going to show them their need and our need for God's love, grace and mercy?

Jesus reminds us, **"For God makes His sun to 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."** (Mt. 5:45-48)

In our lifetime, we are going to come across all kinds of unhappy people; people who are angry with the church, angry with us, angry with God. They may be mean. They may even be malicious. They won't deserve any kindness or consideration we can show to them but we will have a choice to make, because God's Word is working in our lives through the Holy Spirit. God has made us the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Because of that we get to make a choice. We can limit our exposure to this type of people or we can love them like God has loved us? We know what Jesus' choice was and is. Just look at what He did for us and is still doing for us. God gave us a love that we didn't

want or deserve. By the light of His love for us we have been led to our home safely and now we are asked to share that light with others.

Categorizing others people only creates distance and gives us a convenient exit strategy for avoiding involvement with others. Jesus took an entirely different approach. He was all about including all people, not excluding them, but getting involved with them. **“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”** (Jn 1:14) Jesus spent His life walking in the mess of this world and dealing with all kinds of unhappy, dysfunctional folks. “He had equal status with God but didn’t think so much of Himself that He had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what happened; Not at all! When the time came, He set aside the privileges of being God and took on the status of a slave, He became a *human for us!*” He got even with all of His enemies by loving them more than Himself! He gave each of us the ability to have a perfect life now and forever by giving His life, for our death and dying of a Cross and rising again to give us a new life with Him.

God has made you perfect not by what you have done in this world but by what He has done for you. But will you let that love, grace and mercy of God shine in the darkness of the storms of this world so that others may see the light that kept us on the path to our heavenly Home and follow us there. God is working in your life to enable you to shine the light of God’s love, grace and mercy on others. So, let it shine and get even with all your enemies by loving them as much as God has loved you.

Each of us know the importance of having the right clothing and a light with us when we go out into the storms of our life, but do we always use that knowledge to keep us safe? Jesus today is not only encouraging us to keep the cloak of righteousness on, that He has given to us, and take the light of His love with us when we step out in the storms of this world, but to share that warmth and light with others, even our enemies so that they to will be saved. There is no greater love than the love a friend or an enemy that would give himself to save you. Jesus did that for you and asks you to share that love, grace and mercy with others. Amen.