

Scripture:

Psalm 119:33-40

Matthew 5:38-48

“Grace and love.”

And so we continue on in the Sermon on the Mount ---- today.

And not to worry if you haven't been here for a bit ----- today's message stands on its own individually --- but first a little context.

With the Beatitudes --- the very beginning of Matthew chapter 5 Jesus shared a series of blessings we have thanks to the goodness of God.

And then He talked about how we are the salt of the earth and the light of the world --- reminding us all that we are good and true and worthy of the blessings and goodness of God.

And then last week we heard a bit about how to live and behave and share the love of God in some very specific situations --- anger ----- adultery and divorce --- and personal relationships in general.

And now today in the last bit of Matthew 5 ---- verses 38-48 ----- Jesus teaches about fundamental dispositions.

Namely ----- dispositions of grace and love.

And really what Jesus is doing is inviting us to reflect on the character of God.

Jesus invites us to look at people --- and look at situations in life through the eyes of God --- and not just our own limited perspective.

Jesus is looking to mold a certain kind of heart in His followers --- a heart based on the very character of God ----- a heart of grace and love.

And so part of what Jesus is saying here in Matthew 5 today is that our hearts need to be tuned into the frequency of gospel love.

Jesus invites us to experience --- and share ---- the love and grace of God with everyone we meet.

So ----- grace.

“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 anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.”

Jesus takes an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth ----- something traditionally understood in terms of retribution ----- a give and take kind of understanding ----- and moves it to a relationship of restoration ---- a give and --- give more kind of understanding.

Once it was understood --- or as Jesus says --- “You have heard that it was said” ---- there was an appropriate punishment for the specific injustice.

Do this ---- and then have do to that as repayment --- a cheques and balances approach ----- keeping track with ledger books ----- what we might refer to as ---- “fairness” or justice.

And now Jesus says --- “But I tell you” ----- --- in other words forget about what you’ve heard because I’m going to tell you something new and different.

Forget about retribution --- Jesus says ---- forget about eye for eye and tooth for tooth ----- forget about retribution ---- and instead think about restoration.

Put another way ----- forget about fair ---- and think about grace.

Forget about cheques and balances --- and keeping track ----- and balancing out ----- and instead think about grace.

Because that’s how God thinks --- that’s how God works --- in grace.

Fairness is of this world --- and grace is of God.

As He teaches His disciples --- Jesus is looking to mold a certain kind of heart ---- one guided by grace and love.

And so when confronted with evil and when confronted with enemies Jesus says be graceful ---- and be loving.

Don't repay evil with evil ---- don't repay evil at all --- reply to evil.

And reply to evil with grace and with love --- reply to evil as God replies ---- -- with grace and with love.

“If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.”

These things are not easy to do.

Especially the very first one --- “If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also.” ----- but these are what Jesus asks of us ---- and these are also what God does for us --- forgives us --- forever giving us another chance.

What kind of people do we want to be ---- Jesus asks.

Do we want to be people who put ourselves first ----- or do we want to be people who put others first?

In a sense that's the fundamental question our passage addresses today --- “Do we put ourselves first ----- or do we put others first?”

Do we do as God desires of us ----  
 --- putting others first  
 --- turning our cheek for the sake of others  
 --- giving more for the sake of others  
 --- going the extra mile for the sake of others  
 --- helping out others even when it costs us  
 --- sacrificing for the sake of others.

Are we going to be critical and cynical --- a “keeping track” --- kind of people.

Refusing to forget about --- or let go of the fact that so and so maybe owes us a few bucks ----- or so and so owes us an apology ----- or so and so --- “owes” us an invitation to dinner or lunch ----- or so and so “owes” us a return phone call --- and so on.

Are we going to choose to be the kind of people that get so self absorbed ---- -- that we go on calculating and keeping track of who owes who what?

Or ---- are we going to be as God is --- and as Jesus invites us to be --- and stop keeping score ---- and give --- and give more --- even if it means we might get slighted or perhaps even slapped on the cheek.

Jesus invites us to live like this -----

“You need a shirt --- let me get you a shirt – and a coat.”

“You need a cheque next week ----- here’s cash today!”

“You need a lift ---- here borrow my car!”

Jesus talks in the currency of grace --- unmerited unwarranted overflowing love.

Jesus never once used the term “fair” --- to be fair is human --- to be fair we need to keep track --- and God doesn’t call us to just keep track.

Part of what Jesus is saying here in all this eye for eye and tooth for tooth talk is --- “forget about fair” ----- “God doesn’t invite us to be fair --- so forget about it ----- instead be gracious --- God invites us to show and share and live grace.”

Grace ---- give more than expected.

Grace --- go the extra mile.

Grace ---- share what you have with those in need --- without asking for any kind of explanation or justification from them.

Fair is --- I'll only do it if it's deserved --- merited --- warranted --- earned --  
- equal ---- balances out --- and that is not God's way.

“If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.” --- has nothing to do with fair --- and everything to do with grace.

Be gracious ---- turn away from repaying evil with evil --- violence with violence --- hatred with hatred.

Instead respond graciously --- with goodness and love --- give more than expected ---- help more than is needed ---- exceed expectations ----- go as God so leads you not just according to expectations or some kind of secular fairness.

Grace is all about unwarranted --- uncalculated ----- abundant goodness and exuberant generosity born out of a profound love.

And so what about this profound love that is the seed bed of grace.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children 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 own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

Just love ----- Jesus says.

Just love people.

You don't necessarily have to like them all --- but love them all.

Everyone we encounter is created in the image of God ----- everyone we encounter is worthy of our love --- just as we are all worthy of God's love.

As followers of Jesus Christ we are called to love people.

Just as God loves --- freely --- abundantly --- without merit or prejudice or any sense of deserving or earning it --- so are we to love.

Jesus is looking to mold a certain kind of heart ---- a grace filled heart and a loving heart --- full of the goodness of God.

And just as there is a crucial distinction between fairness and grace ---- so there is a crucial distinction between liking and loving.

Jesus doesn't ask us to pretend that people are something that they aren't ---- He just asks us to work at loving them.

Jesus makes it clear that there is such a thing in life as enemies.

Jesus never used words carelessly ---- He wouldn't say ---- "Love your enemies" --- if He didn't also believe that we might actually have enemies.

And unfortunately the hard truth is ----- living out the kingdom of God --- often includes making some enemies.

And Jesus makes it abundantly clear that we are still and always and forever ---- to be people of grace and love both with our friends and family and those who love us ----- and with those who may not really care for us --- "enemies" ----- if you like.

There is no way around it ---- no matter how we look at it --- we are to see all people as worthy of love and respect just as God does.

And we are to treat all people with love and respect in grace --- even if there is little loving and respectful and gracious about them.

God ----- in sending Christ ---- signals a radically new era.

And The Sermon on the Mount clarifies the nature this new era in Christ --- the era of grace and love

The era of radical forgiveness --- and reconciliation --- and of course the era that includes salvation ---- at the cross.

And part of this new era --- this new life in Christ ---- is all about a radical shift and reversal.

----- if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also ----- is quite a reversal

----- if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also --- is a radical change from an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth

-----if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well ----- is a radical shift

---- love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you ---- is a radical kind of love

----- the first will be last and the last will be first --- is a radical reversal

“You have heard that it was said ----- but I say unto you...” ----- signals a new way.

Jesus urges His disciples to move away from business as usual ----- and orient their way of being to the character of God ----

----- forgiveness and reconciliation.

---- authenticity ----- integrity and truth

--- goodness and mercy.

And chiefly for today ----- grace and love.

Grace and love --- turn the other cheek --- go the extra mile --- give --- and then give a little more --- love as freely and generously as God loves.

But then there is also the very last verse ----- “Be perfect therefore as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

“Be perfect therefore as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

Earlier on in this sermon --- in verse 19 --- Jesus instructs His disciples to ---  
----- “practice and teach.”

“...but whoever practices and teaches these commands” -----Jesus says in Matthew 5 verse 19 ----- will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”

I don't know about you but I'm pretty good with practicing and teaching ---  
with trying --- working hard --- sacrificing even.

But this talk of perfection ----- “Be perfect therefore as your heavenly Father is perfect.” --- can be a little more challenging.

But of course Jesus isn't asking us to be perfect --- as in make no mistakes --  
- we're human and making mistakes is part of our DNA ---- we can do no other.

As human beings we're pretty good at messing things up from time to time ---  
and God knows this --- and He still loves us.

When Jesus says be perfect here He means something more like the kind of perfect we see when we say that an apple is perfect --- or a berry is just perfect ---- perfect as in ripe and mature --- whole heartedly --- completely ready.

Be ripe and mature --- be whole heartedly --- and ready ---- to share the very perfection of God --- the grace and love of God.

Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect ----- is all about sharing the radical grace and love of God.

It's not be perfect ---- but display the beauty and wonder --- share the perfection of God --- the grace and love of God.

We are called to be obedient to God ---- share the wonder and beauty and awe of the perfection of God --- Jesus Christ.

God knows ----- that this world is full of less than ideal situations --- circumstances and actions.

Jesus knows that eyes will be gouged out.

As unfortunate as it is ---- Jesus knows the reality that teeth will be knocked out ----- cheeks will be slapped.

Jesus knows that there is sometimes an enemy lurking.

As Emily Bronte said --- “No coward soul is mine.”

The kingdom of God response --- the gospel response --- to the gouging and slapping --- and evil of this world ----- is grace and love.

It’s restoration not retribution.

It’s reconciliation not retaliation.

Jesus invites us to build the kingdom of God --- here and now.

“Your kingdom come your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” --- He says --- just beyond our reading today in Matthew 6 --- the Lord’s Prayer.

The kingdom of God is all about restoration and reconciliation ---- integrity - -- authenticity ---- forgiveness ----- grace and love.

Does anyone ---- remember in 2006 --- the 10 young school girls who were shot dead in Lancaster County Pennsylvania in a one room Amish schoolhouse?

It was pretty big at the time --- and for good reason.

Well --- the response of the parents and brothers and sisters --- and grandparents and elders and leaders of the Amish community was a thing of beauty.

After the murders ---- there was no press release with lawyers and police officers --- there was no sense of retribution or retaliation --- there was no concern with justice or fairness.

Instead there was prayer and there was forgiveness ---- there was grace and there was love --- there was Jesus Christ.

The community offered food and prayer to the family of the shooter --- who had also killed himself --- turning the gun on himself at the end of the rampage.

They literally went to his family --- the family of the killer Charles Roberts and offered food ---- prayer --- and forgiveness.

And at his funeral the Amish outnumbered the non-Amish.

It was compassion and grace and Christian love.

It was turn tom other cheek --- it was go the extra mile --- it was love your enemy.

There was no eye for eye ---- or tooth for tooth --- it was a kingdom of God moment if ever there was one.

That's what Jesus is talking about here.

The kingdom of God is like this --- turn the other cheek.

God's love for you is like this --- go the extra mile.

God's grace is like this --- He loves because of who he is not because of anything we have done or left undone.

And Jesus says --- go and do and be likewise --- be people of grace and love.

Share the perfect love of God with everyone you meet ---- even --- especially --- the challenging ones.

Overcome evil --- reply to evil with goodness and grace and love.

It's brother sister --- let me serve you --- let me be as Christ to you.

And it's --- pray that I may have the grace to let you be my servant too.

As we just sang together.

It's forget about ---- retaliation.

It's forget about retribution ----- forget about judgment --- forget about who is right and who is wrong.

It's grace and love.

It's ---- “We are pilgrims on a journey --- and companions on the road ----- we are here to help each other walk the mile and bear the load.”

We are called to see each other through the eyes of God.

We are called to reveal and share the loving and graceful character of God that all might come to know Him.

The Sermon on the Mount holds before us the beautiful gospel reality that Jesus is looking to mold a certain kind of heart --- one of grace and one of love.

Share the perfect love of God with everyone you meet ---- even --- especially --- the difficult and the challenging ones.

May we see the face of Christ in everyone we meet ----- and may everyone we meet see the face of Christ in us.

Amen