

## Week 12

June 29, 2008

Mt 5:43-48

*Being Freed to Love Your Enemy*

# The Greatest Sermon Ever

This sermon revisits the topic of retaliation that was also a theme in the sermon Kevin preached 2 weeks ago.

## Read Mt 5:43-48

A sermon that asks us the question, "Who is your neighbor?" might be a challenge for us to love the marginalized - the homeless guy who doesn't smell very well, children across the world who walk miles to for dirty water, a family on welfare with bad spending habits, a pregnant teen living on the streets, etc. This is an appropriate challenge to help us look beyond our immediate loved ones to broaden our awareness of needs and call us to respond to them. But, a sermon that asks, "Who is your enemy?" challenges us to open the circle of those we choose to love even more broadly.

"When Jesus tells his disciples to 'love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,' he is stating a theological reality even deeper than the outward advice about strategy toward the world.

Jesus' advice will really work only because Jesus is able to forgive and make whole the man or woman who is the persecutor. This means that we, as his disciples, ought not to view any person as a lost cause or as someone beyond the reach of Christ's love. This confidence on our part as twentieth-century peacemakers makes it all work."  
- Earl Palmer

"Jesus overcomes morals and moralism by something better - God's own life. Where he is alive, active love takes the place of dead moralism."  
- Eberhard Arnold

## Pray Together!

Allow a time of silence for group members to pray using the suggestions listed here.

Commit to continue praying for your enemies.

Pray for your enemies now, and always!

Have you been more aware of your tendencies to react, or think about reacting, with retaliation in the last 2 weeks? If so, what were the circumstances? If not, can you think of any situations now?

What types of people do you think of as enemies?

Who are your enemies? Think of specific people.

What reasons do you have for labeling these people as enemies? In what ways do these reasons contribute to your feelings that you are justified in not loving them; or avoiding them; or hating them; or even choosing to pay them back or treat them badly for what they have done?

Who were Jesus' enemies? In what ways did he love them? What were his attitudes toward them?

What new attitudes do you need to hold onto in order to choose to love your enemies? How will you cultivate these in your life?

*How are we to really accomplish this impossible task?*

John reminded us that we're not being asked to just try harder. Instead, we are to become, like olive oil infused with rosemary, infused with Christ.

Read the quotes to the left. Read Galatians 2:20

What thoughts and questions is God stirred up in you through these readings? What is God encouraging in you through these readings?

Reread Mt 5:44 . . .

***But I tell you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you"***

Along with loving our enemies Jesus commands us to pray for them.

Some suggestions on how to pray:

1. Say a prayer similar to the one Jesus prays for his enemies (Luke 23:34). For instance, empathize with them and pray, "Father, forgive       (name)      , for       (your understanding of why they did the thing(s) that hurt you)      ."
2. Pray a *Prayer of Examination* and a *Prayer of Confession*. Remind yourself of God's presence and love. Ask God to help you notice when you are choosing retaliation and hate instead of love. Listen. Ask God to forgive you for these wrong choices.
3. Pray a Breath Prayer that "infuses" you with Christ. "Holy Spirit, fill me with forgiveness and grace."  
"Give me strength, O Christ, to love."  
"Jesus, love        through me."

For more practical suggestions see Soul Feast by Marjorie Thompson