

# Daily Discipleship

7<sup>th</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany (A) – Matthew 5:38-48 February 19, 2017

Discipleship: *Following the Teacher of Love*

Focus Question: *What does it mean for me to go the second mile?*

## word of life

**“But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile.”** Matthew 5:39-41 (NRSV)

Read Matthew 5:38-48

Jesus elaborates on the Beatitudes found in the beginning of the Sermon of the Mount. Do not seek revenge. Turn the other cheek. Go the extra mile. It seems to be a call to non-resistance.

1. *What is your first impression of this call to non-resistance?*
2. *What makes you think Jesus is serious about this call to non-resistance?*
3. *Give an example of going the second mile.*

Take a moment to reflect on how Jesus responded to evildoers in his own life. Consider how Jesus responded to those in authority who arrested and crucified him.

4. *How does Jesus embody Matthew 5:39-41?*
5. *What music or images from art come to mind when you think of Jesus' response to those who crucified him?*

Jesus chose to defeat evil by suffering. He chose to love his enemies. He chose a radical way of living and loving.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes in The Cost of Discipleship:

The passion of Christ is the victory of divine love over the powers of evil, and therefore it is the only supportable basis for Christian obedience. Once again, Jesus calls those who follow him to share his passion. . . On the cross Jesus fulfilled the law he himself established and thus graciously keeps his disciples in the fellowship of his suffering. The cross is the only power in the world which proves that suffering love can avenge and vanquish evil.” (New York: The Macmillan Company, 6<sup>th</sup> printing, 1965, pg. 161)

Bonhoeffer connects the suffering of Jesus to disciples who desire to follow him. The power of love defeats the powers of evil.

6. *How does suffering avenge and vanquish evil?*
7. *What does it mean for you to be part of the fellowship of the suffering of Jesus?*

Jesus calls us to love our enemies. *Love*. For the first time, that word is used in the Sermon on the Mount. Love includes praying for our enemies. We are to see God's grace extended to the righteous and unrighteous.

Again, Bonhoeffer offers helpful words, “The love for our enemies takes us along the way of the cross and into fellowship with the Crucified. The more we are driven along this road, the more certain is the victory of love over the enemy's hatred.” (pg. 166)

8. *How can love defeat the enemy's hatred?*
9. *What does the victory of love look like in your own life?*

## **word** *among us*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German Lutheran pastor and theologian who lived during the time of Hitler. He could have chosen a safe and secure life outside of Germany, but he chose to return to Germany to be a Christian witness. Bonhoeffer knew there was a cost to following Jesus.

His writings including his reflections on the Sermon on the Mount are found in a gem of a book *The Cost of Discipleship*. In 1945, shortly before the end of the war, Bonhoeffer was martyred by the Nazis. Thus his words on love defeating the powers of evil take on deep significance and are worth pondering.

Bonhoeffer's chapter on Matthew 5:43-48 is titled "The Enemy—the 'Extraordinary'". The title reflects the words of Jesus when he asks, ". . . what more are you doing than others?" (Matthew 5:47 NRSV) Bonhoeffer understands the call of the disciple as a life of extraordinary love. He writes:

[The 'extraordinary'] is the life described in the beatitudes, the life of the followers of Jesus, the light which lights the world, the city set on the hill, the way of self-renunciation, of utter love, of absolute purity, truthfulness and meekness. It is unreserved love for our enemies, for the unloving and unloved, love for our religious, political, and personal adversaries. In every case it is the love which was fulfilled in the cross of Christ. . . . And how does this quality work out in practice? The 'extraordinary'—and this is the supreme scandal—is something which the followers of Jesus *do*. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 6<sup>th</sup> printing, 1965, pg. 170)

There is no doubt the love described by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount is *extraordinary*. It is extraordinary to share that type of love as well as to witness followers of Jesus doing so.

1. *Bonhoeffer used the word extraordinary to describe this type of love. What word or phrase would you use?*
2. *Describe a time when you witnessed this extraordinary love extended to an enemy.*

The teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount are not facts to be memorized. Instead, Jesus calls for a radical way of life. He expects his followers to internalize his teachings and become disciples, ones who love as Jesus loved.

3. *What would need to change in your life in order to love as Jesus loved?*
4. *What is the most challenging part of this passage?*
5. *What would your community look like if every Christian would love as Jesus describes?*
6. *What would your life be like if you lived this passage?*

## **Prayer**

Mighty One, you call us to love as Jesus loved. Be present this day and remind us to love as we have been taught. Amen

## **Dig Deeper**

1 Corinthians 3:16-23

## ***last word***

This week  
pray each day  
for an  
enemy.



*Daily Discipleship*

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