

## Sermon Title: "An Alternative to Revenge"

Sermon by Rev. Tom Harrington

Week of February 27, 2011

### Sermon Based Small Group Discussion Guide

#### Icebreaker

**Big Idea:** God's desire is for us to love everyone, including those who mistreat us.

**Sermon Text:** Matthew 5:38-48

38" You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.'  
39 But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. 40 And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. 41 If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. 42 Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. 43 " You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'  
44 But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 that you may be sons 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. 46 If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? 47 And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? 48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

#### Learning more about the lesson

Revenge forms the fundamental plot for most guy movies. The bad guy hurts the girl and that was his big mistake. He never should have messed with this guy. Arnold says, "I'll be back" (Arnold), Clint Eastwood said, "Go ahead, make my day". You do not want to tangle with Rambo. They are going to make you wish you had never done that. Revenge drives reality TV shows. Revenge forms the main theme of

thousands of songs in every genre. Country songs are especially good at this. Just Google for "country songs and revenge" and find the "Top 75 Done Me Wrong Songs." Have you heard Carrie Underwood's song, "Before He Cheats (Number 3 on the list)," it's a current classic. The Chorus says, "I dug my key into the side of his pretty little souped-up four wheel drive, carved my name into the leather seat, I took a Louisville slugger to both headlights, slashed a hole in all four tires."

Retaliation is the way of the world. Jesus calls us to a much higher ethic. The way of his kingdom soars above revenge. He calls us to a radical divine love for those who have done us wrong. Jesus shocked his original audience with his radical message. The overall message of the Sermon on the Mount is to radically follow the radical Christ. He calls us to be all-in. If we are going to follow Jesus, we should be all-in disciples, people who hold nothing back. We are challenged to take a step to living a radical, kingdom life so we can help more people find and follow Christ. This is our mission as a church; we are people helping people find and follow Christ.

Jesus takes us deep in the heart behind the law that cuts to the core of our being. In the passage for today we see two final statements that reach a high point in the sermon, points for which Jesus is most admired, most misunderstood and most resented. Jesus shows us a way of being human, a way of living, that is so far above and beyond normal ways, that it is nothing short of radical. Prepare to be challenged. Jesus challenges our basic tendencies of self-protection, of selfishness. If we follow Jesus in his teachings it will be like we are going the opposite way on a one-way street.

1. Do you know someone in the workplace who is openly opposed to Christians? How do you deal with this person on a daily basis?
2. The concept of an "eye for an eye" in verse 38 for the scribes and Pharisees was strictly a legislative matter. They not only used this law to justify their motives for revenge and personal

gain, but taught others to do likewise. With this truth in mind, what alternatives to revenge does Jesus offer in the verses that follow?

3. Is there a conflict in Scripture? We are told, "...not to resist evil..." and then we find scriptural illustrations that give us the right to defend ourselves against evil. ( Such as Ephesians 6.10-17; 1 Samuel 17.4-51; *Matthew 10.34*) How do we reconcile these passages?
4. This is a hard saying in verse 41, when you have demands placed on you by your boss or other people at work, family members, relatives, church activities, etc. What might be the purpose behind this command? Someone said, "There are never any traffic jams on the extra mile." Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not?
5. Reread Matthew 5:43-45. In verse 43 the word translated "neighbor" can also be translated "friend." What seems more natural: to love your friend or your enemy? Does loving an enemy seem impossible? Can you think of any examples of a person loving his or her enemies?
6. Consider Matthew 5:46-48. What reason(s) does Jesus give for loving our enemies?

### **Taking it Home**

1. Pray for the one person in your life that is 'too far gone', too far away, an enemy of God and His Gospel.
2. Also pray for the one person who is failing Christ, or who is just bored, wandering or lost in his/her faith.

3. Ask God to make you part of what Jesus is doing today in the people around us and so join Him in His work in our community...

### **Prayer Requests and Praises:**

Dear Lord,

Help us to remember that the person who cut us off in traffic just may be an exhausted single mother who worked since dawn, and is rushing to pick up kids, go home to cook dinner, help with homework, do the laundry, and spend a few precious moments with her children.

Help us to remember that the pierced, tattooed, disinterested young man who can't get our food order right, and who can't make change correctly, may be a worried college student balancing his apprehension over exams and papers with his fear of not getting students loans for next semester.

Remind us Lord, that the scary looking bum, begging for money, may be a slave to addictions that we can only imagine in our worst nightmares. Helps us to remember that the old couple walking annoyingly slow through the store aisles and blocking our shopping progress just may be savoring this moment knowing that based on the biopsy report he got back last week, this may be the last year that they go shopping together.

Remind us Lord, that the person who said something insensitive and unkind to us, might be lonely and hurting inside ... feeling unloved, insecure and unsure of herself.

God of love and compassion, remind us each day that of all the gifts you give us, the greatest gift is love. Help us to realize that it is not enough to just share that love with those we hold dear. Open our hearts to all humanity. Let us judge not lest we be judged ... help us to surrender our rights in order to show love and bring healing ... may we be quick to forgive , and eager to show patience, empathy and love – that we might be more like you. Amen!