**Epiphany 7A2**

**Sunday, February 19, 2017**

**Theme – “Pursuing Prayer for our Enemies” - Matthew 5:38-48**

**Leviticus 19:1-2, 9-18/ 1 Corinthians 3:10-23/ Matthew 5:38-48**

The Extra Mile Mission!?!

Leviticus 19: 1-2, and 18

**The Lord said to Moses, 2“Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: ‘Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy…**

**‘Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.’**

These verses from Leviticus had to be most challenging to the Children of Israel.

I Corinthians 3: 18b and c

 **If any of you think you are wise by the standards of this age, you should become “fools” so that you may become wise. 19For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God’s sight.** And Paul exhorts new believers to grow in their faith and not live by human jealousy and cliquish behavior within the body of Christ located at Corinth.

**People are imperfect; and new believers do not know how to live what they believe. But God gives us all a higher calling.**

**The first part of Matthew 5** tells us that God blesses those who believe who are also meek, peace-making, the dispirited, the mourning, the hunger, the thirsty for rightness, the merciful, the pure in heart and the persecuted. **The second part** talks about being who we are by faith. We are called to be salt and called to be light to the world.

**The third part** tells us that Jesus came solely to fulfill all righteousness. That’s why the Law of God does not disappear under the New Testament or the New Covenant. **In the fourth part** of chapter 5 of Matthew Jesus deals with personal issues in life like Anger, and Lust and the right way and wrong way to certify what you say is true. I’m exhausted just thinking about what Jesus just said. And then He deeply challenges us. **“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of Your Father in heaven.”**He underlines and emboldens this Love your enemies and pray for our persecutors. And then, finally, Jesus really obliterates us when He says, ***“Be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect.”***

**Just send me to hell right now, why wait for judgment day?**

**One real life account applies to our Gospel** for this day. It is about a young Indian missionary working in India with villages and tribal peoples in his country. This missionary is named Pastor Suta. Pastor Suta went to a Hindu village one time and shared the Good News of Jesus Christ with the people there. The people of that village did not welcome him; and told him to never come back again.But Pastor Suta did not obey their charge to not come back again. He came back again.

**Remember this true life event as we go through what Jesus commands.**

How many of you right now understand and understand what Jesus means when he said what he said to people right here, in the Gospel for today? Do you get it?

**Are you still challenged greatly by these words of Jesus?**

And you have to wonder does Jesus mean what He says?

And then you might try to look for an out to these orders of Jesus: like do all the biblical manuscripts say it this way or are there variants that are easier on us?

But, alas, no, there seems to be no leniency.

All I want to do is sing a song in response: **“I love you Lord, and I lift my voice, to worship You O my soul rejoice. Take joy my King in all you hear. May it be a sweet, sweet song in your ears.”**

And then all I want to say, is, *“I want to give up my whole being to you dear Lord, and I want you to cleanse me, and consecrate me to that request. I, myself, totally want to be sold out to You, Lord.”*

But after hearing Jesus’ words I would have to ask, “Is that right, Jesus? Is that good enough, perfect enough for You?’’

Now let’s listen closely. Luke records similar words. In other words, Luke heard the words just like Matthew.

And with Luke recording this, we’d have to say that Jesus indeed did say things like this: ***To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either.*** Luke 6:29

Now we can also find these words. These words come in a letter of Peter who also walked with Jesus; and he writes this about Jesus who lived what he calls us to live: ***When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.*** I Peter 2:23

What do you see or hear…does it not seem like there’s a strong connection?

Remember Isaiah’s prophecy too, do you?

***7He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
    yet he opened not his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
    and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
    so he opened not his mouth.*** Isaiah 53:7

Afflicted… yet He Himself, our Jesus, opened not His mouth.

Before…shearer is silent, so he opened not His mouth.

So what sounds like God the Father through the Son urging us to stand as perfect believers when we follow Him we do not get a break; but what we do get is a truth.

**The truth is the truth that Jesus does want us to go all out for Him.**

But as a true Son of God and as a perfect leader and a perfect Savior, we get to see Him go through what is terrible and submit Himself to revile without reviling in return; and He submits Himself to suffering without causing any and all forms of suffering upon anyone else…

…But no, Jesus came and during the near three year time of His ministry He reversed so many evils, so many illnesses and even death itself. And, yes, in His last days, Jesus submitted to being pierced and nailed, put on the cross to hang and suffocate to death; and die in our place.

Now this is a caveat to what I just said:

**God people are to do what God people are called to do.**

**God people are to do what God equips them by the Holy Spirit to do.**

**It’s always a God thing.**

**In every challenge Jesus gives what he challenges His followers with.**

The challenge is to not strike back but turn also the other cheek. In so doing you will be doing what no one else would do? Give the extra outer covering. Give the extra mile. Give love to enemies-those who are predisposed to do anything against you. Pray for your enemies, too.

Be perfect as Your Heavenly Father is perfect.

Sure. We not only can head toward these dramatic out of this world orders; but we can get there.

**How?** We can get there because God is with us. His Son saved us. Those two send us the Holy Spirit to guide us. We can head toward being and doing what Jesus orders.

This verse is our understanding. There are others of course. But this verse helps us hit the nail on the head: ***When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.*** I Peter 2:23

And the sole reason that Jesus did what He did was clearly because:

***All we like sheep have gone astray;
    we have turned—every one—to his own way;
and the Lord has laid on him
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**In Rick Warren’s Daily Hope devotional …**he writes: In 1956, five American missionaries headed to the rainforest of the eastern Amazon in Ecuador to make a second visit to the Huaorani tribe, which anthropologists said was the most vicious, violent society on the face of the earth. They had a culture of killing, and studies showed 60 percent of the tribe died by homicide.

As soon as the missionaries stepped down onto a tiny island in a river where they landed, with jungle surrounding, they were speared to death by members of the tribe.

The kind of forgiveness that Elisabeth Elliot and Rachel Saint modeled doesn’t make sense until God has forgiven you.

Once you’ve experienced it, how do you forgive?

You do the four things that these women did:

**Relinquish your right to get even.**

Romans 12:19 says, *“Don’t try to get even. Let God take revenge”* (CEV).

**Leave it up to God.** He’ll take care of it, and he’ll do a much better job than you ever could.

**Respond to evil with good.** How can you tell when you’ve completely forgiven someone?

**You actually pray for God to bless the person who hurt you.** The Bible says, *“Do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you”* (Luke 6:27b-28 NIV).

**Repeat these steps as long as necessary**.

Peter asked Jesus in Matthew 18:21, ***“How many times should I forgive someone who does something wrong to me? Is seven times enough?”* Jesus replied, *“Not just seven times, but seventy-seven times!”***(CEV)

Sometimes forgiveness has to be continual-however much, however long it takes.

Source: Michael Duduit, <http://www.preaching.com/sermon-illustrations/forgiveness-2/>

**What Jesus orders in the form of commandments; none of those commands of Jesus are possible or feasible without God’s reign.** The **fulfillment of these and the hope of perfection are only possible because of God’s presence.**

Remember these words too. Jesus says this to the disciples: **“Truly I say to you that with difficulty a rich person will enter into the kingdom of heaven! 24And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than a rich person into the kingdom of God.” 25So when the disciples heard this, they were extremely amazed, saying, “Then who can be saved?” 26But Jesus looked at themand said to them, “With human beings this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”**

Matthew 19: 23-26

When you are a believer in Christ and when you are a parent you need to hear God’s grace because when you are parenting you need a big chunk of God’s gracious assistance and hope every day.

Jesus exemplified that ministry of a challenging love.

His sacrificial death for us is profoundly giving of God’s abounding grace.

His witness for us was to sacrifice Himself to save us.

Therefore:

**Jesus’ standards of righteousness still stand for us to head toward. And God’s grace is greatly abounding when we all short of God’s perfect glory.**

Another example: At one time there was a terrible war between Turkey and Armenia. Their borders touch.

An Armenian nurse had been held captive along with her brother by the Turks. Her brother was slain by a Turkish soldier before her eyes. Somehow she escaped and later became a nurse in a military hospital. One day she was stunned to find that the same man who had killed her brother had been captured and brought wounded to the hospital where she worked. Something within her cried out "Vengeance." But a stronger voice called for her to love; so, she nursed the man back to health.

Later, the recuperated soldier asked her, "Why didn’t you let me die?" Her answer was, "I am a follower of Him who said, ’Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you’" (Luk\_6:27).

Impressed with her answer, the young soldier replied, "I never heard such words before. Tell me more. I want this kind of religion."

That’s why we would want to be salt and light. That’s why we would want to do what Jesus calls us to do.

Abounding grace from God to us, is always abounding more and that’s the reason and many reasons for us to give thanks unto the Lord for He is good.

It is impossible for you and I not to sin, so we do.

It is unbelievable that someone can take our place and suffer the consequences of our sin, but He does.

It is overwhelming to hear Jesus ask us to head toward perfection, and the unending blessings of the Kingdom of Heaven; but then, again, He has shown us the way.

And with Him, as he declares**, “With humans this is impossible but with God all things are possible.”**

**DO YOU AND I HEAR WHY WE LOOK AT GOD’S WORD THROUGHOUT IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND?**

NOW LISTEN TO THIS FINAL VERSE:

***…But whenever the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. 11When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I set aside the things of a child. 12For now we see through a mirror indirectly[***[***c***](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=I+Corinthians+13&version=LEB#fen-LEB-28658c)***], but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I will know completely, just as I have also been completely known. 13And now these three things remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.***

From what I see and hear, we can go the extra mile for the Lord. But when we cannot or when we fail to go the extra mile, there is His grace. Amen.

***He He***

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**Old Testament Lesson: Leviticus 19:1-2, 9-18**

**Epistle: 1 Corinthians 3:10-23**

The Extra Mile Mission!?!

Leviticus 19: 1-2, and 18

**The Lord said to Moses, 2“Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: ‘Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy…**

**‘Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.’**

These verses from Leviticus had to be most challenging to the Children of Israel. They do, however, call for orderly living and challenging loving. Remember that when we talk about our gospel lesson for today.

I Corinthians 3: 18b and c

 **If any of you think you are wise by the standards of this age, you should become “fools” so that you may become wise. 19For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God’s sight.**

And Paul exhorts new believers to grow in their faith and not live by human jealousy and cliquish behavior within the body of Christ located at Corinth.

People are imperfect; and new believers do not know how to live what they believe. But God gives us all a higher calling.

And that’s what we find in Matthew 5.

The first part of Matthew 5 tells us that God blesses those who believe who are also meek, peace-making, the dispirited, the mourning, the hunger, the thirsty for rightness, the merciful, the pure in heart and the persecuted.

The second part talks about being who we are by faith. We are called to be salt and called to be light to the world.

The third part tells us that Jesus came solely to fulfill all righteousness. That’s why the Law of God does not disappear under the New Testament or the New Covenant.

In the fourth section of chapter 5 of Matthew Jesus deals with personal issues in life like Anger, and Lust and the right way and wrong way to certify what you say is true.

But what we see today in chapter 5 is a very hard part to understand.

God’s Words coming to us from Christ are most challenging.

Jesus tells us about getting back at those who have harmed us.

He calls for us to not retaliate.

He calls for us to extend ourselves even farther when challenged by life’s challenges.

Turn the other cheek.

Give not only what you have but even more in response to a suit against you.

 Go the extra mile.

 Give graciously; and do not turn your back toward those who want to borrow from you.

I’m exhausted just thinking about what Jesus just said.

And then He deeply challenges us. **“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of Your Father in heaven.”**

He underlines and emboldens this Love your enemies and pray for our persecutors.

And then, finally, Jesus really obliterates us when He says, ***“Be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect.”***

**Just send me to hell right now, why wait for judgment day?**

With what you said Lord, I am vexed.

**One real life account applies to our Gospel** for this day. It is about a young Indian missionary working in India with villages and tribal peoples in his country.

This missionary is named Pastor Suta. Pastor Suta went to a

Hindu village one time and shared the Good News of Jesus Christ with the people there.

The people of that village did not welcome him; and told him to never come back again.

But Pastor Suta did not obey their charge to not come back again. He came back again.

He came back right in the middle of a couple’s engagement party where all the villagers were attending.

Everyone was dancing and firing off rifles; and celebrating with much food and bright decorations everywhere.

Pastor Suta entered the village and began talking to two women about Jesus.

It was then that a man who was a leader of the village came up to Pastor Suta. He reminded Pastor Suta that they had told him to not ever come back.

But Pastor Suta kept on keeping one with his witness to the two women.

At that time Pastor was hit with the back hand of the village leader. Then others came; and a riot against Pastor Suta ensued. Pastor Suta was beaten near death.

And the village men took his limp frame and cast Pastor Suta in what looked like a newly dug garbage pit.

Now we would think that was it. And we would think that was the end. But it was not.

The man who led the village and the attack on Pastor Suta could not get rid of what he had done. He could not shake it out of his head. So that night, this leader got out of bed, crawled down into the pit, and pulled Pastor Suta’s body up out of the pit, nearly 15 feet deep. He took the pastor home with him. He and his wife took care of him. And they brought him back to a fair semblance of health.

In time, Pastor Suta brought the village leader and his wife and family to faith in Christ. And then latermany in the village came to worship and Bible study so as to hear about Jesus, come to faith and also worship a new God, a real Savior and a genuine Lord. And the parents and children studied the Bible together with Pastor Suta.

**Remember this true life event as we go through what Jesus commands.**

How many of you right now understand and understand what Jesus means when he said what he said to people right here, in the Gospel for today?

Do you get it?

**Are you still challenged greatly by these words of Jesus?**

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What do you see or hear? All of a sudden, as we look and hear those two passages, the one from Luke (which is the same as the one in Matthew); and the one in the Letter of Peter, does it not seem like there’s a strong connection?

Remember Isaiah’s prophecy too, do you?

***7He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
    yet he opened not his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
    and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
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Afflicted… yet He Himself, our Jesus, opened not His mouth.

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So what sounds like God the Father through the Son urging us to stand as perfect believers when we follow Him we do not get a break; but what we do get is a truth.

The truth is the truth that Jesus does want us to go all out for Him.

But as a true Son of God and as a perfect leader and a perfect Savior, we get to see Him go through what is terrible and submit Himself to revile without reviling in return; and He submits Himself to suffering without causing any and all forms of suffering upon anyone else. He could have flattened his captors. He did so in the Garden; but no one was hurt; and they still stood up and arrested Him and took Him to be judged. He could have destroyed the Temple: He did prophecy that none of the huge stones sitting on one another would remain; the Temple would be completely destroyed. He could have overcome Rome. But He did nothing about Rome’s rule. Some have said that Rome fell not only because of its evils and its false gods; but because Constantine took over and began what we might call a Godly rule. But no, Jesus came and during the near three year time of His ministry He reversed so many evils, so many illnesses and even death itself. And, yes, in His last days, Jesus submitted to being pierced and nailed, put on the cross to hang and suffocate to death; and die in our place.

Does that put His orders for His followers in perspective for you?

It does for me.

Now this is a caveat to what I just said:

**God people are to do what God people are called to do.**

**God people are to do what God equips them by the Holy Spirit to do.**

**It’s always a God thing.**

In every challenge Jesus gives what is the challenge?

The challenge is to not strike back but turn also the other cheek. In so doing you will be doing what no one else would do.

Give the extra outer covering.

Give the extra mile.

Give love to enemies-those who are predisposed to do anything against you.

Pray for your enemies, too.

Be perfect as Your Heavenly Father is perfect.

These things sound out of this world; and yet, can we see these orders as standards that stand in front of us.

Given the opportunity to do something, even just a small thing, to change this lousy rotten self-serving world can we not head toward what Jesus says?

Sure. We not only can head toward these dramatic out of this world orders; but we can get there.

How? We can get there because God is with us. His Son saved us. Those two send us the Holy Spirit to guide us. We can head toward being and doing what Jesus orders.

This verse is our understanding. There are others of course. But this verse helps us hit the nail on the head: ***When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.*** I Peter 2:23

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**In Rick Warren’s Daily Hope devotional …**he writes: In 1956, five American missionaries headed to the rainforest of the eastern Amazon in Ecuador to make a second visit to the Huaorani tribe, which anthropologists said was the most vicious, violent society on the face of the earth. They had a culture of killing, and studies showed 60 percent of the tribe died by homicide.

As soon as the missionaries stepped down onto a tiny island in a river where they landed, with jungle surrounding, they were speared to death by members of the tribe.

The brutal murders made news around the world and the cover of *Life* magazine, *Time*, and *Newsweek*. Many newspapers reported the deaths of these men, who included Nate Saint and Jim Elliot.

A couple years later, Elisabeth and Valerie Elliot, wife and daughter of Jim, and Rachel Saint, sister of Nate, moved into the Huaorani village to show love and forgiveness and minister to the people who had killed their family.

Eventually, Mincaye, the leader of the tribe, and the five men who participated in the missionary murders all became Christians.

The kind of forgiveness that Elisabeth Elliot and Rachel Saint modeled doesn’t make sense until God has forgiven you.

Once you’ve experienced it, how do you forgive?

You do the four things that these women did:

* **Relinquish your right to get even.**

Romans 12:19 says, *“Don’t try to get even. Let God take revenge”* (CEV).

* **Leave it up to God.** He’ll take care of it, and he’ll do a much better job than you ever could.
* **Respond to evil with good.** How can you tell when you’ve completely forgiven someone?
* **You actually pray for God to bless the person who hurt you.** The Bible says, *“Do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you”* (Luke 6:27b-28 NIV).

**Repeat these steps as long as necessary**.

Peter asked Jesus in Matthew 18:21, ***“How many times should I forgive someone who does something wrong to me? Is seven times enough?”* Jesus replied, *“Not just seven times, but seventy-seven times!”***(CEV)

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**What Jesus orders in the form of commandments; none of those commands of Jesus are possible or feasible without God’s reign.** **The fulfillment of these antitheses and the hope of perfection are only possible because of God’s presence.**

Remember these words too. After the rich young man gave up on following Jesus because he would not surrender all that he had in order to do so, Jesus says this to the disciples: **“Truly I say to you that with difficulty a rich person will enter into the kingdom of heaven! 24And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than a rich person into the kingdom of God.” 25So when the disciples heard this, they were extremely amazed, saying, “Then who can be saved?” 26But Jesus looked at themand said to them, “With human beings this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”**

Matthew 19: 23-26

When you are a believer in Christ and when you are a parent you need to hear God’s grace because when you are parenting you need a big chunk of God’s gracious assistance and hope every day.

As a parent I still wonder if what I did as a parent when I took time to parent was right?

Was I too lenient?

Yes, at times I was too lenient.

And I don’t consider myself to be a good rule minder or a good penalty box manager.

Did I expect too much perfection?

Yes, because there was a bit of fear in me that said they have to do well or they will not go beyond high school, get scholarships and I will not have enough money to pay for their college.

But I do think as I look back at a young father I would say about myself that I probably did not integrate what I believed when I had trials…very well. God’s grace did not guide my perception of life and how I interacted with life. And God’s grace did not flow with me and through me when I fathered.

And now I know that God’s gracious presence is bigger than me, my children, and all of us.

We cannot erase what Jesus said.

But we also cannot erase the call of the Lord to a very challenging kind of loving ministry.

Jesus exemplified that ministry of a challenging love.

His sacrificial death for us is profoundly giving of God’s abounding grace.

His witness for us was to sacrifice Himself to save us.

Therefore:

**Jesus’ standards of righteousness still stand for us to head toward. And God’s grace is greatly abounding when we all short of God’s perfect glory.**

Another example: At one time there was a terrible war between Turkey and Armenia. Their borders touch.

An Armenian nurse had been held captive along with her brother by the Turks. Her brother was slain by a Turkish soldier before her eyes. Somehow she escaped and later became a nurse in a military hospital. One day she was stunned to find that the same man who had killed her brother had been captured and brought wounded to the hospital where she worked. Something within her cried out "Vengeance."

But a stronger voice called for her to love; so, she nursed the man back to health.

Later, the recuperated soldier asked her, "Why didn’t you let me die?" Her answer was, "I am a follower of Him who said, ’Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you’" (Luk\_6:27).

Impressed with her answer, the young soldier replied, "I never heard such words before. Tell me more. I want this kind of religion."

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It is impossible for you and I not to sin, so we do.

It is unbelievable that someone can take our place and suffer the consequences of our sin, but He does.

It is overwhelming to hear Jesus ask us to head toward perfection, and the unending blessings of the Kingdom of Heaven; but then, again, He has shown us the way.

And with Him, as he declares**, “With humans this is impossible but with God all things are possible.”**

**DO YOU AND I HEAR WHY WE LOOK AT GOD’S WORD THROUGHOUT IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND?**

NOW LISTEN TO THIS FINAL VERSE:

***…But whenever the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. 11When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I set aside the things of a child. 12For now we see through a mirror indirectly[***[***c***](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=I+Corinthians+13&version=LEB#fen-LEB-28658c)***], but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I will know completely, just as I have also been completely known. 13And now these three things remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.***

From what I see and hear, we can go the extra mile for the Lord. But when we cannot or when we fail to go the extra mile, there is His grace. Amen.

***He He***

 **Prayer Topic Starters**

* Pray for those who are being persecuted- for endurance, strength, mercy, and freedom
* Pray for their persecutors- that God would reign down His justice on them and that they’d ultimately come to know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior
* Pray for your enemies—that their hearts would be softened toward the Lord
* Pray for your heart to be changed to be more like Christ