

EPIPHANY 7
MATTHEW 5:38-48
FEBRUARY 18, 19, 2017

YEAR A

Matthew 7:24-27 Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell--and great was its fall!

These verses from Matthew 7 are not part of our lectionary this time around but they come at the end of the Sermon on the Mount. They help us understand what Jesus was saying in Matthew 5-7. The Lord gives this teaching so that we might understand what discipleship is about. Jesus also tells us the difference between those that are wise and those that are foolish. Being wise has little to do with the amount of education we might have or the experiences we might have. It is not about perspective, intelligence or our interpretation of things. What separates the wise from the foolish is whether they hear the word of the Lord, listen to it and follow the Lord's direction. You and I must do more than study these words from Jesus. We listen to sermons but then we do something with what we heard and with what we have learned. We have spent the past several weeks looking at the Sermon on the Mount. Our task is to learn how this takes root in our lives. How do we allow the word of the Lord to penetrate our lives and take root within us? The words of Jesus must become the foundation of our lives of faith.

Matthew 5:43, 44 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

Jesus gives difficult words to follow but they are words that teach us how to become followers of the Lord. We heard last week about murder, adultery and divorce. Jesus teaches more about what it means to be a

Christian and a follower of Jesus Christ as he tells about turning the other cheek, walking a second mile and giving your cloak after your coat has been required of you. Even though these words seem to invite abuse, I do not believe Jesus would have us become a doormat or a target for those that would take advantage of us. Even though Jesus does not approve of abuse he does favor a nonviolent approach in our lives. Jesus says that we are to love our enemies and pray for those that persecute us because of the faith.

In generations past we have examples of leaders that favored nonviolent resistance over using physical force to accomplish their goals. Some might recall Martin Luther King, Jr. leading the way toward civil rights and equal status for all people. When violence was used against minorities he advocated for peaceful demonstration. Before Martin Luther King, Jr. there was Gandhi. Gandhi also taught that nonviolent intervention was the way to overcome oppression. Then there was the German Theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer who favored nonviolent intervention in Nazi Germany. In the end he was executed because he came to understand that there is a time to resist the unjust methods of the government when innocent people are being killed.

Jesus is the example of living faith. When Jesus was persecuted he retreated to a lonely place for fellowship with the Father. It was a time for him to find peace and perhaps pray for those that were seeking to trap him in his words. There were many that opposed Jesus for doing good but Jesus continued to love those he came to save, Jesus continued to love the Pharisees that were constantly trying to destroy him. Jesus loved the chief priests and the high priest even when they were arresting him and sending him off to Pontius Pilate. Jesus even loved his enemies and prayed for them from the cross. He prayed that their sins would be forgiven.

Yet there was a time when Jesus fought against injustice. Jesus drove out the money changers from the Temple and those that were taking advantage of the poor by requiring they pay more than was fair for the proper sacrifice. He drove them out saying, **“My house shall be a house of prayer; but you are making it a den for robbers.”**

Matthew 5:46, 47 For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?
⁴⁷And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?

We must remember that Jesus lived and did his ministry in Galilee and Judea with a few trips into Samaria. Jesus also went across into Gentile places a couple of times. The Romans controlled the places Jesus went. The people our Lord taught and ministered to were oppressed by Rome yet Jesus teaches about loving their enemies. They were to love their Roman enemies. They were to pray for their oppressors. They were to not retaliate against those that meant to harm them because of the faith.

The world Jesus lived in is not so far from our own world. Many in our time are oppressed. Some that are rich oppress those that are poor. Some that have white skin oppress those that do not have white skin. Some that are not Christians might experience oppression by those that claim to be Christians. At the heart of our Lord’s message in Matthew is a message important for what it means to be church today. *“Loving your enemy? Are you serious? Really, Jesus? Do you really mean that?”* Is Jesus just reminding us to be nice to people?

To the rich, powerful and white people Jesus calls us to love our neighbor and to not refuse those that would come to us. Christians are called to care for those that are not like us. We are to pray for those that are considered enemies to our faith and even to our country. Jesus also speaks to the poor, oppressed and minorities. Jesus teaches that they are to love

and pray for those that mean them harm. They are to turn the other cheek, go the second mile and give that last piece of clothing. The church has responsibility to work for justice and righteousness in our families, our churches and our communities.

Matthew 5:48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

If we are to be perfect as our Father is perfect we will walk by faith trusting that God will lead us to a better place. We walk by faith believing that God will lead us to the right action to take. God will tell us when it is time to drive out the moneychangers and those that would oppress others. If we are perfect as our Father is perfect we will love the Lord our God and our neighbors as ourselves. AMEN