



e - Votion

February 19, 2014

Dear Friends,

Today I am reading
Matthew 5:38-48:

You have heard that it was said, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." 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. Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.

You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what sward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.



Devotional Thoughts:

I have followed the activities of Jim Wallis, founder of the Sojourners Community in Washington DC, for years. He was one of the early community-minded leaders involved in urban ministry, living and working in the midst of the most impoverished area in our nation's capital.

Jim Wallis tells a story in one of his books that strikes right to my heart. He got mugged. He had just stepped out of his house (in the middle of the poverty-stricken area in Washington DC) when 4 teenagers rushed up out of nowhere and knocked him to the ground. They kept yelling, "Keep him down! Keep him down! Get his wallet!"

Jim Wallis had other ideas. He popped up very quickly and surprised these young boys. And they appeared to be unarmed, so he squared around face to face with his

attackers. He says that was the first time he actually saw their faces and he realized how young they were. Three of them were about 15 and one much younger boy who was about 12 or 13.

They backed up when they saw that he was much bigger than they expected and bigger than they were. Jim Wallis is a strong advocate for nonviolence but he says it does help to be a weightlifter in these potentially dangerous conflicted situations. The one who hit him moved into a boxing stance, Wallis says, and the others circled around him. The littlest one did a Karate Kid imitation!

Jim Wallis decided that he would confront them--not to hurt them--but to fend them off. So, he scolded them. (He IS a preacher!) He told them to stop, to stop terrorizing people, to stop exhibiting such violent behavior in the neighborhood. And finally he shouted, "I am a pastor!" HE told them if they wanted to beat up and rob a pastor, they should give it their best shot - right then and there. In other words, he played the "Church" card. That doesn't always work in today's world especially because we are so challenged to be relevant in the inner cities.

And something happened. They turned and ran away from him. And then Jim Wallis tried to get them to come back! And then, the youngest kid turned around and looked back and in a very sad voice said, "Pastor, ask God for a blessing for me."

In writing about this, Jim Wallis was just puzzled by the whole thing. They assaulted him. Even the youngest one wanted to be a tough guy. But at the same time he needed a blessing. He knew he was in trouble.

This is a common-enough story in our world today. Every day we see on TV, we read about it in the newspaper, we hear about all the negative things that happen daily. But for me, this incident gives us a glimpse into the mind of a little boy who is risking his future happiness, and maybe even his life, assaulting people.

Two opposing tendencies are at war within this young man who asked for prayer. With so many people, there is a desire for "goodness" versus a craving for "wealth and the things of this world." And with him, there is also the innocence of youth versus the cynicism of a street-life. And then there is the fundamental understanding of God who loves us versus that horrific fear that the devil might be stronger.

That request for prayer allows us to put this young man into the category of "neighbor" rather than "enemy"--even though he is so misguided. The hope is that this young man (and others) will find a community of people who will love him and serve him better than the three friends who teach money-making through theft and violence.

"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." Who is our enemy? Who is our persecutor? Perhaps it is a young impressionable boy, from a less than ideal family situation, who feels trapped in the only life he knows and anger and violence are a

means of survival. BUT... within his heart is a soft spot, that has been, is being, and will be touched by God.

My prayer for us is that we remember those who have injured us --, with words, with ruthless business practices, maybe bosses or supervisors who are arbitrary and demanding, maybe the person down the street who just loves to gossip about us-- that we remember these people all have a story to tell and are children of God.

Please pray:

- For Barbara Marrs, aortic valve replacement TODAY at JCMC. Barbara will be at JCMC until Sunday or Monday and then go to NHC for 3 weeks.
- For the Billings family in the recent loss of Helen
- For our children, both the ones we know, and the ones we don't that God may send to us for love and care.
- For our youth as we seek the right situation with a youth pastor.

Calendar:

- Saturday Mission Activities ALL DAY. Food pantry, work around the church, work at the parsonage. Please contact Serena Crowder if you want to sign up to help.
- Sunday February 23 Rev Francisco Canas will be with us. One service, followed by Pot Luck. Outreach Pillar will provide meat and drink.
- Family Promise here February 23-Mar 1.
- Mar 2--Scout Sunday 10:30 service.
- Mar 3 Worship Pillar
- Mar 14-15 Evangelism Conference Cokesbury Knoxville. The JC District will pay registration fee for anyone who attends.

"Preach the gospel at all times and when necessary use words."

-- St Francis of Assisi

Blessings,

Jane Taylor
First United Methodist Church
Johnson City TN