

'On earth as it is in heaven'

Churchdown Parish Weekend

Session 2: Making it gift – 'turn the other cheek'

'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. Matt 5.38-42.

1. The Law fulfilled

Jesus is the true Moses - 'You have heard that it was said but I say to you ...'
So what was it that left the first religious hearers – steeped as they were in the Word of God – repeatedly gasping, scandalized, uncomprehending and enraged before the words of Jesus?

Can we really be sure it will not do the same for us?
Can any of us really anticipate where this will end up?

2. So what does the old law look like fulfilled ...?

'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.' How do you get from *that* to *this*?
This is a quite new way of relating to the world.
Radical renunciation - more than 'do not retaliate'. This is *willing compliance*.

Jesus gives four examples

a. Struck on the right cheek .

'a blow with the back of the right hand which even today in the East represents the greatest possible contempt and extreme abuse'. Jeremias NTT 239

Why behave like this?

i. Following Jesus

cf Matt 26.67 ill treatment of Jesus - same word and Is 50.6 Servant- 'I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting he who vindicates me is near.'

ii. The way of discipleship

Psalm 69:7 'Because for Your sake I have borne reproach'
- but a different point is being made here

iii. Being like God

More than honouring God – this is *imaging* God reflecting divine likeness
And what in particular are we to reflect of this likeness? By

iv. Living as Gift

Turn, offer, give ... ('I gave' cf Is 50)

The gospel as gift – a way of grace. All is gift.

This response images the life of heaven. It imitates God the Father

Abandoning all the language of vindication, revenge, repayment, recompense - even *religious* vindication!

b. Being taken to court and sued My coat? – take my cloak too!

'In our Age one of the greatest feasts days of the whole year should be April 1st – All Fools Day. A day that should be kept and celebrated religiously and universally. A holy day when no work is done. A day given over to holy gaiety. A day of giving away in unending foolish non-rational generosity, of gifts clothed in the marvels of the imagination. The entering of stranger's houses and the placing of gifts upon their tables. A day of mystical jokes concealing deep mercy. A day when all the mercies of the year gather to

c. Being commandeered Not submission – but a generous compliance.

See Jesus at Nazareth synagogue (Lk 4). Notice what he *doesn't* read. 'A text of judgment was transformed into a message of grace, and his listeners were incensed'. K Bailey *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes* p171

d. Give to everyone who begs from you.

Radical unselfishness in respect of others. Not a response to someone oppressing me but about not, myself, acting as oppressor by withholding from those in need. Er ... Are we to take this literally? Beware of taking giving *seriously!*

Imitating and imaging God. Mercy and gift ... revealed through foolishness ... cf Phil 2 - Jesus *not grasping*, not clinging – non possessive - a core quality of God. It's all gift – he does not even think in terms of 'yours' and 'mine'.

3. So what is this about?

- a. Subverting the script - an insistence on a different way of being known.
- b. Refusal to be victim - turning everything to gift. Make it grace.
- c. Surrendering control – trusting the eschatological hope. 'Do not worry'. 'Your Father knows' 'Your Father sees' – the repeated refrain.

4. Grace – God's wild card

Grace - *the* unique feature of Christian living
Totally outside the usual measures of deserving, earning, needing ... so it's not fair.
'Grace' is anti-rational, anti-logical, not susceptible to calculation of any kind.
Grace breaks the rules ...

cf Matt 20.14-15 workers in the vineyard. "I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?"

How then should we live?

Sources

Sarah Coakley. *The Cross and the Transformation of Desire: Meditations for Holy Week on the Drama of Love and Betrayal.*
Cecil Collins *The visions of the fools and other writings* (Golgonooza Press 2002)
Anne Sexton. *The Complete Poems* (Houghton Miffling 1981)

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The Awful Rowing towards God

I'm mooring my rowboat
at the dock of an island called God ...
I empty myself from my wooden boat
and onto the flesh of The Island.
"On with it!" He says and thus
we squat on the rocks by the sea
and play – can it be true –
a game of poker.
He calls me.
I win because I hold a royal straight flush.
He wins because He holds five aces.
A wild card had been announced
But I had not heard it
being in such a state of awe
when he took out the cards and dealt.
As he plunks down his five aces
and I sit grinning at my royal flush,
He starts to laugh,
the laughter rolling like a hoop out of
his mouth and into mine,
and such laughter than he doubles
right over me laughing a Rejoice-chorus
at our two triumphs.
Then I laugh, the fishy dock laughs
the sea laughs. The Island laughs.
The Absurd laughs.
Dearest dealer,
I with my royal straight flush,
love you so for your wild card,
that untameable, eternal, gut-driven *ha-ha*
and lucky love.
From Anne Sexton *The Rowing Endeth*