

November 5, 2023

Let us pray.

O God of Love, O God of Truth;

Let us say strong things gently and gentle things strongly.

Let us speak the truth in love to all
and love the truth that lives in each.

Let us hear the truth as we each need it and live that truth.

O God, we heed it through Jesus; Your Word & our Lord.
Amen.

Revenge

(Where Does It Take You When You Take It?)

Proverbs 20:22

“Do not say, ‘I will repay evil’. Wait upon the Lord. God will deliver you.”

Matthew 5:38-39

“You have heard it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, ‘Do not resist evil with evil. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other cheek also.”

Romans 12:9-11, 19

“Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good. Love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor...Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine. I will repay.’ saith the Lord.”

While waiting in a doctor's office,
I was thumbing through a magazine,
and an article caught my eye.
And why wouldn't it?
It was entitled, "*Changing My Religion*"

It was actually written by a pastor! - a Quaker pastor;
who was lamenting how difficult it is to live up to
his religious convictions.

He said,

**"Hardly a day goes by that I don't buy something
I don't need. (Quakers believe in simplicity).**

**And at least once a week I want to conk someone
on the noggin. (Quakers believe in non-violence.)**

He continues,

**"Peace and simplicity are only two of our customs.
We have 3 others - integrity, community
and equality - and I'm a flop at those too.**

He concludes,

"My mistake was joining a religion of high ideals.

**If I had joined a religion that celebrated
motorcycle riding, eating fried chicken and taking naps,
I'd be celebrated as a saint and followers would write
books about me and hang on my every word."**

"High Ideals",

One would hope everyone sought a religion for it's high ideals.

Ideals high enough to inspire people, heart, mind and soul;
ideals to improve their lives and the world around them.

But that doesn't seem to be the case nowadays.

In his book, deemed to be a classic, *Your God is Too Small*

J. B. Phillips shows that most people look for an easy religion
- a popular religion.

They prefer a comfortable god. A god they can relate to.

A "What a friend we have in Jesus", god.

Jesus our pal, not our "Lord".

People want a Christ who follows them
more than One whom THEY follow.

One film star said, "God is my Big Daddy upstairs."

A hit pop song asks, "What if God were just a slob like us?"

This Sunday afternoon do a survey: count all the times
God is thanked for helping score touch downs.

Where are the high ideals in all this?

When we look for a doctor to give us care,
don't we expect one with the highest ideals possible?

When we hire a lawyer, a contractor,
or send our children to a school teacher
don't we hope for high ideals?

Why would we have lower expectations of our religion?

And yet, so many do.

It's pretty clear, Jesus knew the religion he gave his life for
would be a stretch for many.

*"Wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction...
but small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life (in me)",*

But, for those who dared - those willing to followed him
the high ideals of Jesus brought them salvation
and birthed us a church.

The high ideals of the Jesus-faith
have always played out in 2 ways.

1st by the deeds of love and justice we are meant to do.

And 2nd , by REFRAINING from doing things we shouldn't.

And, for many, it's the refraining that's the hardest.

It's the refraining where we discover Christ's highest ideals.

Just ask anyone recovering from any addiction.

Friends, in this current time,
perhaps the most urgent and faithful REFRAINING we can do,
is taking REVENGE.

*“Beloved, never avenge yourselves,
but leave room for the wrath of God;
for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine. I will repay.’
saith the Lord.”*

Never in my lifetime, has Revenge become so common,
so normal and so insidious.

Hundreds of innocent deaths are caused each year
because gangs live by a code of revenge.

The landscape of American politics is rife with revenge.

Revenge so openly practiced it seems matter-of-fact,
even popular!

Terrorism is mostly fueled by revenge.

Revenge has polluted the landscape
of ethnic, religious and racial tensions,

making them much more militant, extreme and dangerous.

My sermon title is in the form of a question:

REVENGE - where does it take us when we take it?

and the simplest answer is -

it takes us right where we find ourselves!

In a world of violence, hatred and wanton destruction.

But Jesus is more analytical.

Jesus points us in a more enlightening direction.

“You have heard it was said,

‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’

But I say to you, ‘Do not resist evil with evil.’”

When he mentions **“An eye for an eye & a tooth for a tooth”** he is showing us a sign-post.

That law is one of the world’s great advancements in justice!

It was first found in the 18th C. B.C.

in The Code of Hammurabi, (an ancient Babylonian King)

That code became part of the sacred law of the ancient Jews, as well as the law of the Greeks and the Romans.

In Latin, this law was called, “Lex Talionis”

“Lex”, meaning law.

And “Talionis”, meaning payment in kind.

In other words, the punishment had to fit the crime.

Lex Talionis was a huge advancement in justice.

Before that, If someone stole your cow,

you could kill their children.

And even today, in Sheria law,
if someone smiled at your wife,
you can throw acid on her face and maim her for life.

In Judaism, this progressive law was summed up by the phrase,
“An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.”

But, in his famous “Sermon on the Mount”

Jesus takes retaliation light-years further past Lex Talionis

He said, “No retaliation”.

He said, “No evil for evil, no hurt for hurt,
no murder for murder.

He even took things to the spiritual roots of revenge.

“Refrain from showing your anger.”

“You have heard it was said,

“Love your friend and hate your enemy.”

*BUT I SAY UNTO YOU, “Love your enemies
and pray for those who persecute you.”*

Do the ideals of the Jesus-religion get any higher than this?

Is there a higher ideal in any religion on the face of the earth
than this?

If there is, I don’t know what it is.

And in this day and age,

when we have so much capability to destroy and obliterate,
could there be a more important REFRAINING?

In closing, The Code of Hammurabi had a unique explanation
for WHY lex talionis was so important.

It says, "These laws help separate us from the beasts."
Evolution, my friends.

That is the direction - Evolution

Evolution of the human mind, the human soul
and human society at large.

From the instinctual retaliation of the beasts,
lex talionis gave us a more evolved kind of revenge:

"an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth."

But from there, Jesus wanted to evolve humanity even more.

To a person with higher ideals,
a person with a purer soul,
a person with a deeper faith in God.

So where does Revenge take us, when we take it?

And the answer is, **BACKWARD!** *Today we set clocks back*
But When we take revenge, we are DE-VOLVING, not evolving.

And, when we take revenge
it takes us farther away from Jesus?

Prayer of Pastoral Care November 5, 2023 Dorset

Psalm 43 says, "*O send out your light and your truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling.*" We are asked to pray for the church, the world, and for all who are in need. Let us pray, saying,
God of mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Merciful and faithful God, you sent to us your Son who teaches us the ways of the righteous and brings us into your presence, forgiven and restored. Open our hearts, our ears, our minds to your nourishment by Word and sacrament, that we might willingly obey and trust in you; through Jesus our Lord.

God of mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for the healing of the church with its diversity and divisions. We pray for unity among all people of faith; for understanding where there is hatred or confusion; and for the truth of your mercy to be revealed. As people of many faiths in your world, teach us the ways of serving our neighbors.

God of mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for reasoned voices to prevail in the governments of nations. We particularly lift up the leaders and people of Israel and of Gaza and the Palestinians. We pray for the protection of civilians, and all hostages, young and old, in the midst of the war. May all accept that rage and revenge is not a policy that benefits any side. We pray for more humanitarian aid: for water, food, fuel, and medical supplies to reach hospitals and civilians caught in desperate conditions.

God of mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for the earth and its climate. We thank you for the piano concert last night in behalf of conscious action for a cooler earth. Be with all who are still recovering from natural disasters. We pray for renewed efforts in working for gun safety. May the vision of your beloved community be always with us.

God of mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We bring before you those on this church's immediate needs list. ...

Help us to pray with persistence. Gather up our prayers, O God, and for those for whom we did not know how to pray. Make us ever more faithful as we lean into your coming kingdom of justice, peace, and love; through Jesus Christ, our light, and our hope.

HYMN # 628 Precious Lord, Take My Hand

Amen.

OFFERING

With humility for all that God has given us, let us gratefully give for the work of the church and the healing of this world.

OFFERTORY Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring J.S. Bach

*DOXOLOGY

*DEDICATION

Holy and merciful God, you know the joy that is in us when we offer ourselves, our time, and our possessions for the work you set before us. Use these gifts to heal and teach, to comfort and challenge, that all the world might give you praise. In Jesus' name. Amen.

COMMUNION HYMN # 425 (1st verse) Let Us Break Bread Together

