

Text: Matthew 5:38-48

Theme: Just Like Your Father

Date: February 19, 2017 (Epiphany 7A)

In the Name of Christ Jesus, Dear Children of the Heavenly Father

“You are just like your father.” Have you ever heard that phrase? Has anyone ever said that to you? If the children leave their shoes in the middle of the living room floor, their mother may say to them, “*You’re just like their father.*” Such a statement, however, could also be said in a complementary manner. If your father is a man with a good reputation, well liked and respected among his peers, you would be very pleased if someone would say to you, “*You’re just like your father.*”

So, I ask you today; if people look at you, watch you and listen to what you say, could they, would they, say of you, “You are just like your father.” My question is not referring to whether or not you resemble your earthly father in mannerisms or character but rather the question is intended to ask, “*Are you like your heavenly Father?*” That really is the point of Jesus’ words in our sermon text for today. As Jesus says, **BUT I TELL YOU: LOVE YOUR ENEMIES AND PRAY FOR THOSE WHO PERSECUTE YOU, THAT YOU MAY BE SONS OF YOUR FATHER IN HEAVEN.** Jesus puts these words before us as a reminder and as an encouragement for us to know and believe that we by virtue of our baptism we are the adopted sons and daughters of our heavenly Father. As such we have the privilege to approach him in prayer and love him as a dear father. As his sons and daughters in faith we do not fear of his anger nor are we motivated by a threat of punishment. Instead, we have the joy of loving because he first loved us. In Christ Jesus, our heavenly Father reached out to us in love and first forgave us all our sins so that we would have his power to love as he first loved us. **Today Jesus helps us to understand what it means to be like our Father in heaven.** Do we look like him when we act? Do we sound like him when we speak? Do we love like him when we love? If it were not for Jesus who first loved us, these would be very depressing questions because we know that the answer is “NO”. But we also know by faith that Jesus did love us enough to die for us for the times we have failed to love. And Why? So that by his grace and mercy we can live to give our Father in heaven all glory and honor when we act, when we speak and when we love.

1. What We Do

When Jesus speaks in the words of our text he tells us what it means to be just like our heavenly Father. YOU HAVE HEARD THAT IT WAS SAID, ‘EYE FOR EYE, AND TOOTH FOR TOOTH.’ BUT I TELL YOU, DO NOT RESIST AN EVIL PERSON. IF SOMEONE STRIKES YOU ON THE RIGHT CHEEK, TURN TO HIM THE OTHER ALSO. If someone is teasing you at school, hurting your reputation at work, or making fun of you in some other way, how satisfying it would be to our sinful nature to do the same thing back to them; mocking them and hurting them in some way. If you do this to ME, then I’m going to do that to YOU. If you take this from ME, then I’m going to take that from YOU. But that is just sin talking. Hatred gets even, love endures. Jesus further illustrates his point with these words: **AND IF SOMEONE WANTS TO SUE YOU AND TAKE YOUR TUNIC, LET HIM HAVE YOUR CLOAK AS WELL. GIVE TO THE ONE WHO ASKS YOU, AND DO NOT TURN AWAY FROM THE ONE WHO WANTS TO BORROW FROM YOU.**

So is Jesus saying that we should we simply let people walk all over us, take everything from us or do anything to us that they want? Is Jesus saying that we should let others take advantage of us? Certainly this is not the point of Jesus’ words. So what is the point? By these words Jesus is addressing the attitude of our heart as it relates to the things of this world and as it relates to the people of this world. How easy it is for us to view our tunic and cloak, our earthly possessions as “my stuff.” I earned them, I worked hard for them. Why should I just let someone take them away from me? But just when we are tempt to think this way, God’s Word reminds us, “*The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it*” (Including my cloak and tunic). So the things we thought were “my stuff” aren’t mine at all. They all belong to God, our heavenly Father. God just lets us borrow them from him. God just lets us use them. **But how does he want us to use our possessions? Always to his glory!** God gives us many opportunities to use our possession to his glory. We provide for our family. We give our thank-offerings in worship. We pay our taxes. And we give to those who are in need. And so Jesus with these words is asking us to look at our heart of faith when it comes to the stuff God’s has borrowed to us and ask, “*Does how I use God’s stuff give him glory?*” That really is why God has borrowed it to use in the first place. If someone needs my earthly blessings more than I do, then I want to be like my heavenly Father and give such a person what they need. That would be acting in love just like our Father. Such actions would show God that I know where all these earthly blessings came from in the first place and they would show God that I trust him enough to believe that he will continue to bless me with what I need when I need it. Such an attitude of the heart gives all glory to our Father in heaven.

In addition to giving God glory with how we use our possessions, Jesus also want us to be just like our Father in the way that we use our time and our talents to give God glory. Jesus says, **IF SOMEONE FORCES YOU TO GO ONE MILE, GO WITH HIM TWO MILES.** In Jesus’ day it wasn’t uncommon for a Roman regiment to march through your town. As they did so, any soldier could tell you to carry his fifty to seventy pounds of gear for him for one mile and you would be required under law to do so. You could not say “No” or refuse to serve. You had to do it. Normally, you would think, you would carry it, hate it every step of the way and then when a mile is reached, you drop it and leave. Yet that’s not what Jesus says. No, Jesus says. Volunteer to carry it another mile! **IF SOMEONE FORCES YOU TO GO ONE MILE, GO WITH HIM TWO MILES.** Showing love by going the extra mile in your service of time, doing the extra act of kindness with your God-given talents is how we are like just like our Father in giving God glory. Yet how often

have we settled for doing the bare minimum in our service to others? If asked to clean our room, how often do we do a quick job, grumbling all the way? And would it ever occur to us that when we get done cleaning our room, that we would go and clean our brother's or sister's room? When others see us going the extra mile with our time and talents, maybe just maybe, those actions open the door for someone to ask, "Why? Why did you do what you did? Why did you turn the other cheek, why did you give your clothes away, why did you go the extra mile. Why? Why do it?"

In the words of our text for today, Jesus answers that question. Some might be tempted to think that our motive for doing what we do is to bring attention to ourselves or boost our self-image before others. But Jesus explains that such a motive wouldn't be being just like our Father; such motive wouldn't give glory to our Father in heaven. So Jesus goes on to explain the relationship between love and good works.

2. Why We Do It

How many commandments are there? So might say "Ten." We would understand that answer because we have learned that God gave two tablets of stone to Moses that contained God's will for his people. But really when we more closely examine God's will we learn that there is only one command that God gives, LOVE! Love for God! Love for others! The Apostle Paul in writing to the Romans explains how love is a summary of the Ten Commandments, "*Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another. The commandments, 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not covet,' and whatever commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law*" (13:8-10). Paul makes it clear; Love is the only commandment that God gives us.

It's a commandment that God himself kept perfectly. "*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life*" (Jn 3:16). God perfectly loved those who were unlovable. "*But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us*" (Ro.5:8). The depth of God's love for sinners is unimaginable. Jesus says, "*No one has greater love than this, that someone would lay down his life for his friends*" (Jn. 15:13 HCSB). How much did God love us? When they struck Jesus on the cheek, he turned the other to them. When they took everything away from him, he gave them even more. Jesus gave more than just the clothes off his back; he gave them his back to be beaten with 40 lashes minus 1. Jesus didn't just give the bare minimum to pay for the sins of the world; he went the extra mile; he gave it all. "*It is finished!*" That's the measure of his love for you and me and all people.

As a result of God's perfect love for sinners, we are forgiven of every sin. While we were God's enemies, Jesus' love made us the sons and daughters of our heavenly Fathers. In Christ, God declared us to be just like our Father. And so our Father says to us: **LOVE YOUR ENEMIES AND PRAY FOR THOSE WHO PERSECUTE YOU, THAT YOU MAY BE SONS OF YOUR FATHER IN HEAVEN. IF YOU LOVE THOSE WHO LOVE YOU, WHAT REWARD WILL YOU GET? ARE NOT EVEN THE TAX COLLECTORS DOING THAT? AND IF YOU GREET ONLY YOUR OWN PEOPLE, WHAT ARE YOU DOING MORE THAN OTHERS? DO NOT EVEN PAGANS DO THAT? BE PERFECT, THEREFORE, AS YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER IS PERFECT.** Jesus could have come down from heaven and given us a bunch of laws and said, "*Follow these commandment and clean up you act.*" But he didn't. He came down from heaven and "cleaned up" our act for us so that we, who were his enemies, could experience his love and in turn love others, even our enemies. "*We love because he first loved us*" (Jn.4:19).

And so how about you? Whom do you love? It's easy to love those who love us. Jesus says that even the unbeliever can do that? But how difficult it is to love those who do not love us? Those in the family, at work, in our community, or in our relationships with fellow members of Faith Lutheran Church. How willingly have you been to turn the other cheek toward your spouse, or give the proverbial shirt of your back to the back-stabbing co-work or go the extra mile for the cantankerous neighbor? But even more important than "*What you did or didn't do*" is "*Why you did what you did?*" Why did you turn the other cheek or go the extra mile? Was your motive worldly praise and self-gratification? Or Was your motive to glorify your Father in heaven. Today our Savior wants us to ask these hard questions because that's what children of the heavenly Father do. They ask, "*How can I, as a child of God in baptism, glorify my Father in heaven?*"

So how are we doing? Are we just like our Father, our Father in heaven? While we may have similar traits and tendencies to that of our earthly fathers, it's obvious that we can never be sinless just like our heavenly Father is sinless; we daily sin in our thoughts, our words and our actions. We miserably fall short of perfect love for God and others. Yet every time we do, we are reminded that Jesus never did. He perfectly turned the other cheek, he willingly gave more than the shirt off his back – he gave his life; Jesus eagerly went the extra mile for you and me. The fact that we daily sin should never release us from the desire to love God and others just like our heavenly Father loves us. And so when it comes to loving others, we want and are empowered by Jesus' love to be just like our Father. May God's Spirit grant us such grace for Jesus' sake. Amen