

## Wesley United Methodist Church

February 19, 2017

“The Second Mile.”

Matthew 5:38-42

Mark Twain once said this about the Bible: “I have no problem with parts of the Bible I don’t understand. It’s those parts of the Bible I do understand that gives me fits.” The Scripture that I just shared with you fits in that category.

Did you know that one of the easiest things in the world to do is to become a Christian? It is ridiculously easy. All you have to do is to confess that you are a sinner, repent of your sins, believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross for your sin and was raised from the dead. You surrender your life to him as your Lord and Savior and you become a Christian immediately. There is not an easier thing in the world than to become a Christian. But at the same time, one of the most difficult things in the world is to be a Christian. This morning I want to share with you why that is.

What Jesus says is totally opposite to the typical attitude in America. Some time ago there was a bumper sticker that became very popular. It simply said two words, “I want.” That small sign would just fit any car in America. We live in the country of “I want.” I want my rights; I want my happiness; I want my way; I want my money.

Rights are considered as American as Apple pie. This is a country where citizens have rights. The best known part of the Constitution is the Bill of Rights. I’m all for the right kind of rights, but today rights don’t so much protect the innocent as they promote the guilty. If you’re going to be a real Christian, you’re going to have to give up some rights.

We’ve all heard the expression, “Do your duty.” Well, the Lord Jesus once again tells us something that no human would have ever thought of. He is going to tell us, “Do what is not your duty,” and “Do more than your duty.” That is going the second mile. What does this mean?

“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I tell you do not resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on the right cheek, turn the other to him also.” In the 1<sup>st</sup> Century a slap on the cheek was a way of insulting someone. A slap on the other cheek was yet another way of insulting someone. Today it would be like an insulting comment. We say today, “That was a backhanded compliment if I’ve ever heard one.” This refers exactly to what Jesus was talking about.

You see, there were two things that would make any Jew mad 2,000 years ago; one would be a spit in the face, and the other would be to backhandedly slap him on the cheek. In fact, that is exactly what they did to Jesus. “Then they spat in his face and beat him; and others struck him with the palms of their hands.” (Mt. 26:67) Even a slave would rather be struck on his back by a whip than slapped on his cheek by his master.

When somebody slaps you, what is your natural impulse—it’s to slap them back. Someone insults you, the first thought is to insult them back. That’s the way we think. But Jesus said, “If you are a Christian, as hard as it may be, you should turn the other cheek.” Let me say here that Jesus was not talking about Christian passivism. He was talking about personal revenge, not social justice. This has nothing to do with war in Afghanistan or Iraq or anywhere else for that matter. What Jesus is talking about is retaliation, revenge, retribution. It’s what Paul said in Romans 12:19, “Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written, “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord. In other words, you never get even by trying to get even.

Let me give you a simple rule. Be quick to defend others, but be slow to defend yourself. Sometimes you don’t get a chance to even think about to defend yourself. You are crucified before you know it.

Abraham Lincoln once said, “I never give an explanation of my actions to my critics.” He said the reason is simple. “My friends don’t need an explanation and my enemies wouldn’t believe it.”

Now this is wise advice, but having said that I think it is worth noting that Jesus suggested two cheeks, not dozens of them. He was not advocating that we become a doormat to people who try to abuse us or walk all over us. Paul went on to say in that 12<sup>th</sup> chapter of Romans and verse 18, “If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all people.” Now sometimes that is not possible.

A story about a small man who walked into restaurant and sat down to eat, and a big bully sitting on a barstool got up and walked over to that little man and chopped him across the neck; knocked him flat on the floor. As the man was getting up, the big man said, “That’s karate from Japan.”

Well, the smaller man rubbed his neck, sat back down and tried to eat his meal. A few minutes later the big man returned, picked up the little man off the chair threw him over his shoulder and said, “That’s Judo from Japan.”

Well, the little man walked out of the restaurant with the big man laughing at him. He returned a few minutes later, walked behind the big man, cracked him over the head and said, “That’s a crowbar from Sears.”

Sometimes self defense is not only warranted and necessary, it’s good for the other person. Forgiveness, and not revenge, should be our first response.

“If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also.” The situation that Jesus describes was very common in Bible days. If one person took another person to court, and the person did not have the money to pay the judgment, the court could order payment of the lawsuit in clothing. You could take the man’s tunic; you could take the man’s shirt, but you could not take his coat.

Now the shirt was a type of tunic that was worn as an undergarment. The coat was an outer garment that served as a blanket as night. Most people in those days owned only one coat and perhaps one or two shirts. The reason the coat was mentioned specifically is that was the most valuable garment people owned. It served both as a blanket and a shelter. Mosaic law required that the coat could not be kept. “If you ever take your neighbor’s garment as a pledge, you shall return it to him before the sun goes down. For that is his only covering, it is his garment for his skin. What will he sleep in? When he cries out to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate.” (Ex. 22:26-27)

Jesus goes beyond the law of the land and the Mosaic Law. He said, “If you lose a lawsuit, but the judgment does not satisfy the plaintiff, and there are still bitter and hard feelings, voluntarily give him more than the judgment if it will make things right, and so you can settle things not only legally, but you can settle things morally.”

In a situation like this when you give more than you are asked, you are showing that you regret any wrongdoing on your part; you are showing that you have no bitterness toward the other person, and you are showing that you want to make things right. There are times when you should not see how little you can give, but how much you can give. Still want to be a Christian??

“If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.” Remember that Israel was occupied territory. It was controlled by the Roman Empire. The Romans had a law that greatly embittered the Jewish people. By law, a Roman soldier could order a Jew to carry his weapons, or his knapsack, or any burden that he had, one mile. It didn’t matter whether the Jewish person was working in his field or on his way to the synagogue to worship. The Roman soldier had the right to take the man and force him to carry his burden. Every Jewish boy had marked off one mile from his house and had memorized the exact distance. Whenever a Jewish boy or man was ordered to go that mile, he would walk that mile, put that burden down, and with a bitter look on his face make the point “not one foot more.”

The Pharisees had it all broken down in just how little they could get by. But Jesus said, “Don’t go just the first mile that you have to go, go the second mile that you don’t have to go, because that’s where the real blessings of life are found.” I want to tell you what you already know. It’s not easy going the second mile. But let me tell you this. If you only go the first mile you’re a victim. If you go the second mile you’re a victor. The first mile is the lone mile; the second mile is the love mile. The first mile is the slave mile; the second is the free mile.

Becoming a Christian is one thing; being a Christian is another. Every chance you get for the glory of Jesus, for the goodness of others, and because of the grace of God, go the second mile.