

SERMON 7 EPIPHANY (2-19-17)

A young seminary professor tells the story of a phone message he received from his 10 year old daughter, Erin. After a long day at work, Dad stumbled into the kitchen arms loaded with groceries and sees the flashing message light on the phone. Dropping his bags he presses the flashing light and hears the frantic voice of his daughter. **“Dad, I’m the lector at church Sunday, and I have that passage that says, ‘Turn the other cheek.’ You know that passage, right? Do the other Gospels have that same passage? Is it different in the other Gospels? Could you let me know, because.....no offense, Dad, but I think Jesus is wrong?”**

This morning we get to eavesdrop on Jesus’ instructions to the disciples as they prepare to move on in their ministry. It comes near the middle of the Sermon on the Mount and Jesus tells them in no uncertain terms what being God’s disciple means. In the first line our text we hear “You have heard it that it was said, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” Our reaction?, **‘go Jesus, that’s right Lord. If you take my eye, I take your eye, if you take my tooth, I take your tooth. You get what you give. Right on Jesus. We are IN!!!!!!!!!! AMEN.** In his very next breath

Jesus says to them, “**But I say to you**, do not resist the 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. Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Be perfect, therefore as your heavenly Father is perfect. **WHAT? PERFECT? WOOO, Jesus hold on a minute!! This is a game changer** How do we do that? What you’re asking here is unreasonable and impossible.....No offense, Jesus, but we think you are wrong, wrong, wrong!!!

I recently saw a Documentary called “*In Our Sons Name*”. It is the heart wrenching story of Orlando and Phyllis Rodriguez, a couple who lost their 32 year old son Greg, in the North Tower of the World Trade Center on 9/11. Amidst the cries of hatred, and the calls for revenge, and military retaliation, they struggled with their grief and anger as they tried to make some sense of the complete senselessness of this horrific act. After months of prayer, soul searching, and discussion, they realized that to fight senselessness with more senselessness was not productive, healing, or the way to honor their son’s name. As time went on they set out on a course to bring healing, forgiveness, compassion, and love into the world.

In the process they reached out to Aisha, the mother Zacarias Moussaoui of one of the few men apprehended in connection with one of the most heinous crimes in history. In November of 2002 Phyllis and Aicha met, and Phyllis soon realized that this also was a mother filled with pain and buried under guilt and grief, for she too had lost a son to the senseless brainwashing of the terrorist regime that threatens this world. Aicha knew her child could face the death sentence or most certainly never see the light of day again. Aicha and Phyllis formed an amazing bond and began to tour the world speaking out against the emptiness of violent acts. Orlando went on to testify for the defense at the trial of Zacarias. His plea was to not invoke the death penalty. Orlando and Phyllis went on to visit prisons and many, many other places bearing the message of, forgiveness, and healing, bearing the gift of God's redeeming love.

Is Jesus wrong? Is what he is asking of us impossible? No, not really. Phyllis and Orlando are living examples that it is possible to forgive, heal and love again. What Jesus is doing in today's Gospel is sharing God's vision of his world where love genuine and unconditional reigns and that love is embodied in Jesus and each one of us is wrapped in that love. What exactly, then, are we being called to this morning? I believe we are being called to be vision makers with God. We are being called to dig deep within our hearts and souls and examine why our natural instincts

are to cry out for an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Why when the brokenness of this world rears its ugly head, is our solution... if they bomb us, we bomb them, if they are homeless, poor, cold or hungry, let them get jobs and take care of themselves. We are being asked to stand in the shoes of the “other”, to think of how we would feel if we were surrounded with hate and rejection without ever having anyone listen to our story. When has bombing a country filled with innocent children, or turning our backs on the homeless or the hungry or being just plain mean to someone, **EVER EVER** brought healing to this broken, limping world? Is any of this God’s Vision?

What **does** God’s vision for His world look like? I believe God’s dream for this world, is that it be full of mercy and justice, forgiveness and reconciliation, healing and love. This morning we are being invited anew to be bearers of God’s vision and builders of His kingdom. We are being asked to shed the safety of our old instincts and to bask in the genuine, reconciling, and unconditional love of God in Jesus Christ and to share that love with a world that is crying to be heard.

Impossible? No. Hard? **Absolutely**. The journey before us is difficult and fraught with blockades and pitfalls, but we do not travel it alone. We are a community of Jesus’ disciples and we are not assembled here by accident. We are

here at God's will to share our hopes and fears, our failures and successes, our pain and our joys. We are here together to find the face of Christ in one another and to wrap each other in the arms of Christ's love. We are here together to gather courage and strength to find the face of Christ in all people and to be his loving arms in the world outside these walls. Each time we touch each other and the "other" with genuine and unconditional love, in the name of Christ we are perfect doing the **perfect** will of our heavenly Father. **POSSIBLE!! Amen**