

## Wesley United Methodist Church

February 23, 2014

"Walk the Smile Mile."

Matthew 5:38-48

Mark Twain once said this about the Bible: "I have no problem with those parts of the Bible I don't understand. It's those parts of the Bible I do understand that give me fits." The passage that we are going to hear certainly fits into that category.

This passage illustrates something I bet most of you have never thought about before. One of the EASIEST things in the world to do is to become a Christian. It's ridiculously easy. All you have to do is confess 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, and surrender your life to him as your Lord and Savior; and you become a Christian instantaneously. 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, and you're going to see that illustrated this morning.

What Jesus says in our Scripture this morning is totally against the typical attitude in America. Years ago there was a bumper sticker that became rather popular that simply said two words: "I want." Now that tag would fit just about every 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 tell 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 not to resist an evil person. but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also." (v. 38-39) In the 1st Century a slap on the cheek was a 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 2000 years ago; one would be a spit in his 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. Bill Cosby has interviewed thousands of children and received hilarious responses to his questions. He was talking to a little boy one time named Peter, and he said, "Do you try to do the things Jesus told you to do?" Peter said, "Jesus hadn't told me to do nothing." Cosby said, "Well how about if somebody hits you on the cheek, turn the other cheek." Peter said, "What does that mean?" Cosby said, "That means if somebody hits you, you don't hit him back." Peter looked at him confused and said, "That don't sound too smart." Cosby said, "Well that's the whole point of what Jesus said, Peter. You have to be bigger than the other person." Peter thought for a moment and he said, "Well, that makes sense because if you're bigger then you should hit him back."

That's the way we think. But Jesus said, "If you're a Christian, as hard as it may be, you should turn the other cheek." Let me emphasize that Jesus was not dealing with Christian passivism. He was talking about personal revenge, not social justice. This has nothing to do with war. The Bible says in I Peter 2:13-14, "Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or

to governors, as those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good." What Jesus is talking about is retaliation, revenge, retribution. It's what Paul said in Romans 12:19, "Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written 'Vengeance is Mine. 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. 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 that 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 we become a doormat to people who try to abuse us or walk all over us. Paul went on to say in Romans 12:18, "If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men." Sometimes that is not possible. Sometimes self defense is not only warranted and necessary, but it's good for the other person. Forgiveness, not revenge, should be our first response.

"If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also." Now 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 at night. Most people in those days owned only one coat and perhaps one or two shirts.

The reason the coat is mentioned specifically is that was the most valuable garment that people owned. Because it served both as blanket and, in a sense, a shelter. As a matter of fact, the 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? And it will be that when he cries to Me, I will hear, for I am gracious." (Ex. 22:26-27) Jesus goes beyond both 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 hard feelings, voluntarily give more than the judgment if it will make things right and thereby you can settle things morally. In a situation like this when you give more than you're 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.

I heard about a man who was going to celebrate his anniversary, and he went to his wife and asked her what she would like. She said she would like some perfume. So he went to a department store, headed straight for the perfume counter and told the saleswoman that he wanted to buy his wife a nice bottle of perfume for their anniversary. Well, she pulled out a container of their best perfume and told him it was on sale for just \$50. He said, "Well that's really more than I want to spend. What else do you have?" She pulled out a smaller bottle for \$30. He said, "That's still too much. Give me your most economical brand of perfume." She pulled an extremely small bottle that cost only \$15. He still wasn't satisfied with the price, so he said, "Look, Lady, let me be very specific. Show me something that is real cheap." The clerk reached across the counter and handed him a mirror. A Christian should always be willing to give more than he's asked. It may cost more in the short run, but it will gain a lot more in the long run.

"And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two." 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 compel 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 soldier had the right to use this 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 compelled to go that mile, he would walk that mile down to the very foot, put that burden down, and

with a bitter look on his face make the point "not one foot more." The Pharisees had all of life boiled down to a minimum of what they had to do and what they could get by. But Jesus said, "Don't just go 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 blessing of life is found."

Last week I needed to find a certain place here in town and on my way, I saw some very familiar people standing in front of a house talking. I turned around and stopped asking if they knew how to get to that place. One of the persons told me to follow her and she led me right to the place in question. It would have taken me a lot longer to get there and closing time was only about ten minutes away. That person went the extra mile and I thank her for it. When you go that second mile, you will be a blessing to others.

"Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away." The implication here is that the person doing the asking has a real need. If it is a real need you should meet that need. That doesn't mean that you are required to respond to every foolish and selfish request.

In Psalm 112:5 we read, "A good man deals graciously and lends; he will guide his affairs with discretion." When someone comes to you and has a real need, and asks to borrow something, loan it to them. Even better yet, if you can, give it to them. But do it with discretion.

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 mile is the smile mile.

The really successful people in life, and the really happy people in life, and the really blessed people in life are the second milers. When Jesus came to this earth to take away the sins of the world, he went the second mile.

Becoming a Christian is one thing; being a Christian is another one. 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.