**Repay With a Blessing**

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Words fly across social media these days – words flung far and wide. So this morning when I read the daily lectionary these words jumped out at me: “Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but on the contrary repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called – that you might inherit a blessing.” 1 Peter 3:9

This reminded me of my days of teaching music in a private church school. Often times the younger elementary children would come to my class with tales of woe- something like this: “Johnny hit me first so I hit him back but I was the one who got in trouble. It’s not fair!” I often pointed out to these students that they had options other than hitting or kicking back such as telling the teacher, walking away, telling this person to stop. And next time, if they could choose another less violent response they probably would not get in trouble. However, they could not seem to get past their own ‘righteous’ indignation that the one who started it should be the one in trouble, not them! They simply could not accept that their choice to answer in kind put them squarely in the wrong and usually the one in trouble because they were the one the teacher noticed.

I have to confess that today I yearn for more constructive discussion and less reactive bashing, name calling or explicative-filled diatribes on social media. I yearn for more blessings being given in the face of abuse and evil – especially among those who call themselves Christians. It is ever so easy to fall into the same trap that others set for us and choose to belittle, make fun of or throw our own barbed comments back.

But practically how do we reply or respond with a blessing to the one we totally disagree with? How do we keep from responding in the same cutting tone? How do we offer support for what we feel is right without harming or disrespecting another? How do we preserve or offer goodness and mercy?

Jesus also called for actions that seem quite as or more difficult than the ones Peter offers. In Matthew 5:38-39,44-45 Jesus begins “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you, Do not resist an evil doer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also…love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.’’

The whole idea about the ‘eye for an eye’ was to limit vengeance was quite revolutionary in the Old Testament times when God instituted this for the Israelites. Jesus, as usual, seems to be saying we can do better in limiting our vengeance. We can instead take these moments as opportunities to show love just like God does. For at the end of the day it’s not about how many good come backs or stinging rebukes we’ve made. It’s about whether we loved like our heavenly Father loves. Not because the one who persecutes us will necessarily change his/her stripes but because we are called to be a blessing to others.

We will be discussing these and other challenging teachings in the coming weeks of our Kingdom Life Sermon series. I hope you will join us! This Sunday Jan. 29th is Kingdom Life: Being Blessed, Matthew 5:1-12.

A Blessing

How can I bless her when I think she’s wrong?

How can I affirm him when his words carry hurt so strong?

Though my ways may not agree with yours,

and your thoughts disagree with mine,

still,

I bless you because you are precious in God’s sight,

so also in mine.

I bless you, my friend, though we may disagree.

I bless you with joy, love, goodness, kindness and mercy.

May this day be full for you of all that brings you peace.

I choose to offer life to you, for that is what I am called to do and be.