



Feb. 23, 2020 Matthew 5: 38-48 & Lev.19: 1-2, 17-18

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Link to [Beck](#) (paywall) other [Beck](#)

Stone, Naomi. [Love's Healing Power-](#)

Rolheiser, Fr. Ron. [The Struggle to Love our Neighbor](#)

[Monastery Sunday Homilies](#) 2/19/17

[U tube link](#)

ENTERING THE SCENE:

Walter Wink argues that the three brief (and witty); scenarios in 5: 39-41 offer examples of disciples resisting oppressive power by reframing its ultimacy and exposing its limits and brutality. In these exemplary scenarios, the oppressed seize the initiative, secure dignity, and confound the oppressing powers. Turning the other cheek is not doormat masochism, but a courageous act that seizes initiative in refusing to be cowed and subjugated. Giving one's cloak and coat means confounding the one who sues by offering everything. One's nakedness exposes among other things, the oppressor's greed and merciless power. Carrying the soldier's pack and extra mile contravenes the oppressor's rules of angaria by seizing the power of decision and placing the oppressor in a position vulnerable to accusations of abuse. These are words that can help us hold on to our own truth in times that we seem helpless to make things change while still recognizing the humanity of the aggressor. Pg. 143-2. Fr. Beck's book [Banished Messiah](#)

Mt. 5: 38-48

38 **"You have heard that it was said,** 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' 39 **But I say to you,** offer no **resistance** to one who is **evil**. When someone strikes you on (your) **right cheek**, **turn the other** one to him as well. 40 If anyone wants to **go to law** with you over your **tunic**, hand him your **cloak** as well. 41 Should anyone press you into service for **one mile**, go with him for **two miles**. 42 **Give** to the one who **asks** of you, and do not **turn your back** on one who wants to **borrow**. 43 **"You have heard that it was said,** 'You shall **love** your neighbor and **hate** your enemy.' 44 **But I say to you,** **love** your enemies, and **pray** for those who **persecute** you, 45 that you may be **children of your heavenly Father**, for he makes his sun rise on the **bad** and the **good**, and causes rain to fall on the **just** and the **unjust**. 46 For if you **love** those who **love** you, what recompense will you have? Do not the **tax collectors** 28 do the same? 47 And if you greet your **brothers** only, what is unusual about that? Do not the **pagans** do the same? 48 So be **perfect**, 30 just as your **heavenly Father** is **perfect**.

DISCUSSION QUESTION: Understanding how God loves, requires seeing as God sees. How is my vision impaired when the "rain falls and the sun shines" on both the good and the bad?

PRAYER: Lord, it is easy to believe that God rewards the good and punishes the bad, most of the time. But there comes those times when bad things happen to good people and good things happen to bad people. Then my belief system crashes. I am faced with the possibility that God is working with a different set of principles. I suspect it had a lot to do with God loving all that God creates. Help me to trust that loving those who don't know this will help me to hang in there. Amen.

WORD STUDY AND QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

YOU HAVE HEARD THAT IT WAS SAID: Jesus, the Jew, knew his scriptures and could reach for authenticity by quoting one of his scriptures to validate what he was about to say.

How do you feel when someone quotes one of your tenets of faith in order to pull you into a deeper understanding of something?

BUT I SAY TO YOU: Jesus now invites his listeners to expand their current understanding of scripture by opening themselves to a totally new way of understanding.

What can make me do the same?

EYE/TOOTH: The saying about eye and tooth was rooted in the Hebrew understanding that a person could only exact punishment equal to the evil done them. This kept things from feuds from developing in their honor based society.

Does our modern justice system do the same for me?

RESISTANCE: Resistance can take many forms. One is having enough power to overcome any aggressor. Another is having enough courage to challenge the legitimacy of the aggressor.

Which kind of power appeals to me? Why?

EVIL: Evil is a planned attack on a good or a vulnerable person.

How do you know if an attack is planned or not?

RIGHT CHEEK: In order to make a slap an insult to the dignity of someone we slap them with the back of our hand on their right cheek.

Are there other ways we do the same thing to insult or demean another person today?

TURN THE OTHER CHEEK/BACK: In order to acknowledge my inability to resist the insult, I can freely challenge the other person to move from insult to cruelty by offering a passive resistance and still demonstrate my freedom.

Can you think of other ways you, or others, have turned an insult into a position of quiet strength?

GO TO LAW: To go to the courts to arbitrate a claim, especially if you feel the deck is stacked against you, you can take the imitative and volunteer to give what is being demanded, by taking the high ground and shaming your aggressor.

What kind of self-esteem is needed in order to find creative responses in a hostile situation?

TUNIC/CLOAK: This is the first example of non-violent resistance since the law (Ex. 22: 26) gives a person an inalienable right to keep a cloak. (See below) Anyone demanding a person's cloak would demonstrate that they either didn't obey their own law or were so greedy that they could care less about the law, thus incurring shame.

How is this clever response another example of non-violent resistance?

ONE MILE/TWO MILES: In order to suppress resistance, a dominating power (Rome), insisted that a soldier could only demand that a person could be required to carry their heavy (approx. 80 lb.) pack one mile. Otherwise, the soldier himself could be harshly punished.

What laws today exist today, that non-violent resistance could work the same way

GIVE/BORROW: In order to short circuit the resentment when someone neglected purposely or non-purposely to return something, Jesus advises to lend not expecting it to be returned, thereby putting the responsibility on the shoulder of the person to act honorably.

How can that also work for us today?

LOVE/HATE: In a language system that used polar opposites to make a point, Jesus stretches our imagination to its limits.

How has wanting the well-being of someone who has used or hurt me caused a faith challenge for me lately?

PRAY: To pray is to ask for God's help with someone or something we feel unequal to on our own.

When was the last time I asked for help with loving someone's or something's well-being.

PERSECUTE: To persecute is to aggressively want to hurt or demean someone, just because I have the power to do so.

When was the last time you felt persecuted?

CHILDREN OF YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER/ BROTHERS: Underlying all these teachings is the reality that God is our father and the father of everyone, making us brothers and sisters.

How can accepting this truth enable me to pray for those who persecute or oppress me?

BAD/GOOD / JUST/UNJUST: Evidently Jesus sees beyond the bad/good, just/unjust polarities and is able to let God be God.

Am I able to trust God like Jesus trusts God? If not, why not?

TAX COLLECTORS/PAGANS: In including the obvious outsiders in this teaching, Jesus is expanding God's care to everyone not just those who accept the law and its requirements.

Once more, I am expected to expand my understanding of God's love. Do I welcome this exclusivity or not?

PERFECT: To be perfect is to have nothing unfinished or needed in order to be whole.

What is needed in my faith life today that needs to be done or finished in order to be whole?

PARALLEL TEXTS: Mt. 5: 38 // Ex. 21: 24; Lev. 24: 19f; Mt. 5: 39 // Lk. 6:27-38; Mt. 5: 41 // Lam. 3:30; Rom. 12:19f; Mt. 5: 42 // Dt. 15: 7f; Mt. 5:43 // Lev. 18:18; Mt. 5: 46 // Lk. 6:32; Mt. 5:48 // Lev. 11:44; 18:2; James 1: 4; 1 Pt. 1:16; 1 Jn. 3:3;

OTHER TEXTS OF THE WEEK: Lev. 19: 1-2, 17-18; Ps: 103: 1-13; 1 Cor. 3: 16-23; Mt. 5: 38-48;

Revised Common Lectionary: Lev. 19: 1-2, 9-18; Ps. 119: 33-40; 1 Cor. 3:10-11, 16-23; Mt. 5:38-48;

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION:

Without forgiveness, there is no future. Desmond Tutu

In Iran today: <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2017/02/12/why-eye-for-an-eye-never-dies.html>

Fr. Beck's book [Banished Messiah](#) examines how Jesus took the law of Talion and reversed it. Instead of repaying violence with violence, he broke the law's back and lived and died to reveal the truth that the Messiah has freed us from the cycle of violence that

this law established. The meaning of the principle, Eye for an Eye is that a person who has injured another person returns the offending action to the originator in compensation. The exact Latin (lex talionis) to English translation of this phrase is actually "The law of retaliation." At the root of this principle is that one of the purposes of the law is to provide equitable retribution for an offended party. The phrase, "an eye for an eye", (ayin tachat ayin, literally 'eye under eye'), is a quotation from several passages of the Hebrew Bible. (Leviticus 24:19–21, Exodus 21:22–25, and Deuteronomy 19:16–21) in which a person who has injured the eye of another is instructed to give the value of his or her own eye in compensation. It defined and restricted the extent of retribution in the laws of the Torah. The English word talion means a punishment identical to the offense, from the Latin talio. The principle of "an eye for an eye" is often referred to using the Latin phrase lex talionis, the law of talion.

How do disciples respond to oppressive violence whether by master, rich creditor, or the empire's soldiers? The usual options of "violent fight or flight" are reflected in 5:39a as disciples are instructed to not use violence to resist evil. Rather disciples are to live a third way, of nonviolent, creative, subversive resistance. Walter Wink argues that the three brief (and witty); scenarios in 5: 39–41 offer examples of disciples resisting oppressive power by reframing its ultimacy and exposing its limits and brutality. In these exemplary scenarios, the oppressed seize the initiative, secure dignity, confound the oppressing powers. Turning the other cheek is not doormat masochism, but a courageous act that seizes initiative in refusing to be cowed and subjugated. Giving one's cloak and coat means confounding the one who sues by offering everything. One's nakedness exposes among other things, the oppressor's greed and merciless power. Carrying the soldier's pack and extra mile contravenes the oppressor's rules of angareia by seizing the power of decision and placing the oppressor in a position vulnerable to accusations of abuse.. Pgs. 142-3.



A basic theme in the ascetical writings of St. Aelred of Rievaulx is that *"what each one has belongs to all, and what all possess belongs to each one."*¹ St. Aelred repeats this five times in his writings, applying it not only to material goods, like clothing and food, but also to spiritual goods like the virtues of prayer and fasting, humility and charity, and even to eternal goods like our happiness in heaven. He writes, *"The happiness of each belongs to all, and the sum total of happiness in the whole universe belongs to each one individually."* Homily on feast of Alred by [Fr. Stephen Verbest 1/12/17](#)

On turning the other cheek:

Throughout the Gospel Jesus asserts God's claim of sovereignty, often in language that expresses a polemic against imperial claims and practices. Jesus declares, for example that God controls the sun and sends the rain (5:45), claims often associated with Jupiter. Pg. 63 Carter, Warren. *Matthew and Empire: Initial Explorations* Harrisburg, PA .

While there is no teaching that I know of in ancient Jewish literature equivalent to Jesus' "Love your enemies" (Mt. 5:4) there is a teaching in the Talmud that deals with the same moral/spiritual issue by commenting on the teaching, "You shall not take vengeance nor bear a grudge" (Lev. 19:18). The ancient rabbinic text used the implied distinction between "vengeance" and "grudge bearing" in the original passage to convey a spiritual course in life: One should not take active material vengeance for any kind of material hurt, even retaliation against someone who would not lend to you a tool by refusing such a loan to that person in return. Even pointing out the difference to another person between one's own generous behavior and other person's churlishly ungenerous behavior to you in the past is grudge bearing. Do not do it. Pgs. 53-4.

Herbert Bronstein. Bruteau, Beatrice. *Jesus Through Jewish Eyes*. Maryknoll, NY. Orbis Books. 2001.

..a studied and deliberate way of seizing the initiative and overthrowing evil by the force of its own momentum. What Jesus distilled from the long experience of his people in violent and nonviolent resistance was a way of opposing evil, without becoming evil in the process. Pg. 137. Wink, Walter. *Engaging the Powers*. Minneapolis, MN. Fortress Press. 1992.

He who cannot forgive others breaks the bridge over which he himself must pass. -Edward Herbert of Cherbury (1583-1648)

Our ultimate goal is to be able to think and behave like Jesus. This is a journey toward great love, which invariably becomes a journey of great suffering. This journey leads us to a divine love where we don't just love those who love us. We learn to participate in a larger love—where we experience Someone Else loving through us, in us, and for us. If we remain autonomous, independent, self-sufficient, we cannot participate in this larger love. Christian spirituality is a mystery of participation. Thus the saints and mystics speak so much of surrender, abandonment, and even "falling" into God. Richard Rohr

Never does the human soul appear so strong as when it forgoes revenge, and dares forgive an injury. Edwin Hubbel Chapin

The conscious mind determines the actions, the unconscious mind determines the reactions; and the reactions are just as important as the actions. Many Christians are Christians in their actions--they don't lie, steal, commit adultery, or get drunk; but they react badly to what happens to them--they react in anger, bad temper, self-pity, jealousy, and envy... When the depths are held by the Holy Spirit, then the reaction is Christian. - E. Stanley Jones (1884-1973), "Conversion"

Our path of ongoing transformation (after the great falling into Love) largely consists in struggling with our own shadow self, facing interior conflicts and moral failures, undergoing rejection, abandonment, or humiliations, and learning to experience any limitations gracefully. Sorry to put it so bluntly, but these are the common gateways into deeper consciousness and the flowering of the soul. They alone prune away the illusions and pretenses of the false self. These daily experiences give us a privileged window into our actual truth, because seemingly impossible contradictions are now staring us in the face; and we can only seek holiness in what is,

what is right now, and who we really are, not in any idealism or pretty feelings which never last. Some form of “weeping,” forgiveness, and radical self-acceptance are usually necessary to invite one into this utterly new and contemplative mind.
Richard Rohr: “Opening the Door: Great Suffering and Great Love”

In Jesus’ time and our own, a blow from the back of another’s hand shows the greatest possible contempt. In addition, in the ancient world, one’s cloak, an expensive garment, was an extremely valuable possession. Each of these parodies represented a possible mode of action. When struck, although we would want to strike back, it is possible to turn the other cheek. It is possible to offer your cloak when someone’s takes your coat, to which a Jew had an inalienable right in the Hebrew Bible (Ex. 22:26). If you had only two garments, that meant going naked. We can answer aggression with non-violent restraint. Pgs. 158-9. Lewis D. Solomon. Bruteau, Beatrice. *Jesus Through Jewish Eyes*. Maryknoll, NY. Orbis Books. 2001.

Consciousness is more like dancing than it is like digestion. Pg. xii
Noe, Alva. *Out of Our Heads: Why You are not your Brain and Other Lessons from the Biology of Consciousness*

Try pausing right before and right after undertaking a new action, even something simple like putting a key in a lock to open a door. Such pauses take a brief moment, yet they have the effect of decompressing time and centering you.
- A life practice from Br. David Steindl-Rast

Every person has to come to the God experience on their own. Conversion is a foundational change in life position, perspective, and finally, one’s very identity. After the transformation God is not out there anymore. You don’t look at God as a separate identity; you look out from God who lives in you and through you and with you. That is a major shift, probably the most major shift possible for humans. Richard Rohr.

He who thinks that loving one’s enemies is impractical doesn’t take into account the practical Consequences of hating one’s enemies.
Erich Fried

Forgiveness is the key that unlocks the door of resentment and the handcuffs of hate. It is a power that breaks the chains of bitterness and the shackles of selfishness.-Corrie Ten Boom

Only when we can claim our God-made selves as the true source of our being will we be free to forgive those who have wounded us.
Henri Nouwen

Those who know the gift of forgiveness in their own lives can be the presence of this love and compassion for others who still are not alive to the secret in their own hearts. Forgiveness is the gift to transgress all boundaries of propriety and welcome others into the circle of life which the presence of God has reintroduced in his gift of reconciliation. Fr. David Bock O.S.C.O.

When God decided to create the world, God foresaw all the sin that human beings would commit. The only way God could continue was to decide to forgive the world before creating it. Strange as it may seem, the commitment to forgive comes before the creation.
Old Jewish story.

The person who loves God cannot help loving every man as himself, even though he is grieved by the passions of those who are not yet purified. But when they amend their lives, his delight is indescribable and knows no bounds. St. Maximos the Confessor

Forgiveness is me giving up my right to hurt you for hurting me. – Anonymous

Perhaps these reflections can give us a clue to a deeper meaning of forgiveness. More than a reconciliation between empirical egos, a making-up of estranged personalities, or the more profound joint effort of wrong-doer and wronged to undo the wrong, perhaps forgiveness can be seen as an act of faith in the future and as evidence that one knows where the living being is truly lodged and will not be distracted from it by the dead husks of past deeds. Continuing to pour energy of life and of goodness towards all, we not only do the most powerful thing that can be done to encourage good acts hereafter, but we loosen the hold of false identifications of our self and the other, and we deepen our realization of both of us as transcendent centers of spondic energy capable of communion. Pg. 54.
Bruteau, Beatrice. *The Grand Option: Personal Transformation and New Creation*. Univ. of Notre Dame Press. IN. Notre Dame. 2001.

SUGGESTED READINGS:

Links to all the books mentioned in this guide are on The Ark web site: www.theark1.com

Beck, Robert. *Sunday Homilies: Cycle A* 2014. Pgs. 59-63. To order contact [Carol Oberfoell](mailto:Carol.Oberfoell@theark1.com)

Beck, Robert. *Sunday Homilies: Cycle A* 2001. Pgs. 50-53. To order contact [Carol Oberfoell](mailto:Carol.Oberfoell@theark1.com)

Hays, Edward. *The Ethiopian Tattoo Shop*. Easton, KS. Forest of Peace Books. *The Revolutionary* Pgs. 113ff.