

Transcript of sermon video  
19 February 2017 - Hanapepe United Church of Christ  
Rev. Michael O. Christensen

1080p/30fps - 24:19

["True Colours" background]

[HUCC Community Media Services logo]

[Credits]

[Sermon intro]

["True Colours" fades]

00:30

Thank you, Nancy...Did it start to sound familiar? Like it had extra verses?

00:41

That's the "other" version of the Ten Commandments...and, actually, it's not just a neat and tidy ten. It's a whole list of how to live in that community that God is building out of Israel.

00:57

...and it's there that, by doing justly, and following God's law, that you live out "love your neighbor as yourself."

1:10

Now we turn to page four, in the New Testament section of our pew Bibles, we're still in Matthew, still Matthew 5, the opening of this gospel of Jesus as the Messiah...

01:23

Yes, I could have this marked beforehand...this is a not so subtle hint that you have plenty of time to look it up for you...

01:31

[Laughter in congregation]

I still think it's better to see it and hear it both.

01:47

Matthew 5, 38 to 48...this is another one of those rabbinical teachings of Jesus, where Jesus says, "You've heard it before, but I say unto you..." We've had parables, but we're back to sayings again...and He's contrasting what we just heard from the law, and that's the basic law...

02:11

...not all the little tiny fragments used to implement it...but here's what Jesus has to take the law in another new direction.

02:30

"You have heard it said...and eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth." Now...that was originally intended to only take an eye for an eye, or a tooth for a tooth. Do not escalate violence.

02:39

You lost one tooth? You're entitled to one tooth...not two. You take two teeth, we start a fight.

[Pause]

You have heard it said, "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you, do not resist an evildoer. If anyone strikes you on the right cheek, then you should turn the other also..."

03:08

...and if anyone wants to sue you, and take your coat, give them your cloak, your overcoat, your raincoat, as well. And, if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile.

03:21

Give to everyone who begs from you...how much interior resistance am I hearing to this one?

[Giggling in congregation]

And do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.

03:32

...Oh, boy...

[Indistinct chattering in congregation]

...Already we're in trouble! By the way, some of the background here... people were struck regularly, it was an occupied country, the Romans were in charge.

03:53

...not just the soldiers, but all the Romans...and, if you're gonna be sued for clothing, that violates an ancient Hebrew law that, even if in a lawsuit you win this fellow's cloak, you have to give it back every night if he doesn't have a house. If he lives homeless, you have to give him his cloak back, so he can sleep of a night.

04:18

And they have to bring it back to you in the morning. The other one is going the extra mile. The background is this...a Roman soldier, much as the British soldiers did in colonial America, can force you to do stuff by law. Just as the British soldiers could be billeted in your house, and you had to feed 'em, and you had to have a bed for 'em, even if it was your only bed....

04:50

...and they got fed...first...and you always had to be ready for them to come and go as they pleased...in the Roman occupation of Palestine, any Roman soldier could say, "Here's my pack! You carry it!" And, by law, you had to carry it for at least a mile...a Roman mile.

05:11

Now...you know how popular this law is, right? There are always bully types who love to do this to people, right? Here! Here's my stuff! You do it! ...Instead of bucking against it...take the extra load, and go double.

05:34

It's almost like that old saying, you know...Smile! They'll wonder what you're up to!

[Giggling]

Do these things...to break the mold.

[Pause]

05:52

Forty-three on..."You have heard it said, you shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy." Now, interestingly enough, that's not what we heard in the law, we heard you shall love your neighbor as yourself, to build God's holy community of Israel.

06:10

But...practical advice...it's kind of like, "Well, the Bible must say like that somewhere!" This is one of those sayings that comes in...love your friends, and hate your enemies...love your neighbor, hate your enemy... but, I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven.

06:39

...Oh, boy...Whew!...[Pause]

There is an extreme case of an ancient and honorable African Methodist Episcopal church in Charleston, South Carolina, where a young man, not crazy, but a believer in an evil, racist system came in and shot nine people in their prayer meeting, and killed them.

07:14

That church, and the families of those people, and the pastor, who died, actively prayed for this man, and showed up at his trial, and urged clemency so he could repent.

07:30

Pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven. What we're usually pretty good at is ducking the bully, or not getting noticed. [Pause]

And most of the time, we pray that we never get this test put on us.

07:51

But...bad happens to us all...and how we react...to those who want to push us around...can be done in a heavenly way.

08:08

...For...verse 45...he makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. How many times have I heard in my "corn belt" background, some preacher stand up and say, "You know why we have a drought? Because you people are sinners!"

08:32

You need to all come forward...and you also need to bring a really large offering...

[Giggling...indistinct chatter]

Have they not heard of meteorology? We have a whole series of microclimates on this island...

08:49

...and we live on the dry side. Not quite the driest part of the dry side, but pretty close. Midsummer it reminds me of the Great Plains of Nebraska...nice and brown and crispy.

09:01

...and that's OK...that's what it's supposed to be in the summertime...but Lord help you if you can't afford the water bill. [Sigh]

It really bothers me that God just rains on everybody! You know, it just really bothers me that the sun shines on crumb-bum people!

09:21

You know..."Oh, Lord, I've been good! Why is he getting his stuff too?"

[Giggling]

Because God sends it to everybody!

[Pause]

But my preacher told me that if I was good, everything would go well!

[Giggling]

I'm sorry...but your preacher was wrong!

[Muffled laughter]

09:44

Those Old Testament passages that say "we will follow God so that all may be well with us"...are basically self-serving rationalizations of the Old Testament that Jesus is doing away with...and saying the sun shines on everybody, and the rain falls on everybody, and it comes when it comes, and it does what it does.

10:07

...because God is not a chooser of persons. God is not going to guarantee you that you will make whatever amount of money you want to make a year, if you give ten percent of it to me right now. That's what the "prosperity gospel" promises...

10:28

You give me ten percent of what you want for an income. You want a hundred thousand? Fine...put ten thousand in the offering plate, please. You want fifty thousand? Five thousand in the offering plate. You want a million a year? Give us a hundred thousand!

10:36

...and we'll guarantee that God will bless you! Notice I didn't say God would give you a million bucks...I just said God will bless you.

10:58

Sounds like certain political bait and switch I've heard lately.

[Pause]

God sends resources for everybody...the choice is how we use it. God also does not withhold the rain, from bad or good people, nor send storms for punishment on others...

11:23

As my father said one time in the middle of a drought..."How bad was the drought? The drought was so bad..." I asked my dad, how cracked was the ground between the cornstalks, and he says, "Well, the crack's wide enough, and nobody wants to lose a log chain down the hole tryin' to see how deep it is."

11:39

It was that dry, OK? An eight-inch rain fell, and none of it ran off, that's how dry it was. And Dad said, "I wonder what God is teaching us today!" Everybody should know how to get along in drought...I wonder how God is teaching that to us?

12:02

Well, I couldn't very well complain like I was planning to after that, could I?

[Pause]

What is God teaching us in tough times?

And...are we grateful for the blessing received in good times?

12:20

Usually it's the other way around. Good times..."Gee, Lord, look what I did!" Bad times..."Gee, Lord, why did you do this to me?"

[Giggles]

Let's get this straight. The resources of all come upon all the way they come. What matters is how we respond.

12:43

[Pause]

...and it goes on in 46, 7, and 8..."for if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others?" Now, this assumes you get along with your brothers and sisters...

13:57

Do not...even the Gentiles do the same thing...

[Pause]

I'll only send Christmas cards to people who send Christmas cards to me. I'll only go to parties with people who invite me...I'll only throw a party for people who'll throw a party for me. I will only do tit for tat.

13:41

I will only do reciprocity.

[Pause]

Have you ever just given away a Christmas card or a gift, knowing full well that those crumb-bums haven't talked to you in so many years, but they need a card anyway for no other reason than just to bother them with your presence?

[Pause]

14:03

Or do we very carefully make a list..."I'm not sure those people are worth a 46-cent stamp..."

[Lay speaker says, "Forty-nine..."]

How much?

[Lay speaker: Forty -nine]

Forty-nine cents? I thought they went down...well, they didn't...OK...

14:22

So much for forever stamps...great...OK...See what I'm sayin'? We normally sit and make all these calculations...which we don't have to do! We can live free without all this...stuff.

14:38

I was always grateful that not only did I move away from my huge extended family, but so did everybody else. There's nobody left in Shelby County, Iowa that's closer than a fourth cousin...except my brother...and everybody else is gone!

14:57

A couple of people I went to high school with are still there...you met Rex, he went there, too...but...I'm really glad I don't have to keep those equations going. It's also why...like any pastor, at some point...the previous pastor makes a few friendships, but, by and large, when we go, we go.

15:23

By and large, we are really grateful for the pastors who have been with us before, but most of us don't expect to hear from them again every time there's an event. They also have some rules about that...don't go back and do funerals...

15:39

...you know, that kind of thing...but...[Sigh] keeping that kind of track wears you out. I don't know if you live with the calculus of how many relatives do I still have, and how many of them do I want to claim, and how many cards should I send, and which event I go to...it will wear you out!

16:06

Where instead, I asked a member of the church today, I said, "How was the wedding?" And she just beamed.

[Giggles]

That's what it oughta be! You go because it's a happy thing and you want to share it.

16:21

You don't make a big calculation before you go, like how good a relative are they, or how good a business partner have they been, or, you know, what kind of neighbor are they? If you're invited...as Jesus said...if you're invited to the heavenly feast...you go.

16:38

And if you don't go, we'll go out on the street and find people who will. Don't live your life bogged down in calculations of right, wrong, and relationship. Now, the other scripture closes with, "Love your neighbor."

17:00

The Old Testament scripture...this one closes with, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Now, in the Greek, that is not perfect as in, "I never made a mistake!" [Unintelligible] Anyone here ever been totally perfect? I have known some people who thought that in their heart of hearts...

17:23

...But..."perfect" here means grown up...complete...developed. It doesn't mean that along the road you haven't made mistakes. It doesn't mean there aren't things you need forgiven for. It doesn't mean that you always had the best intentions. But, it does mean that as you grow up in Christ, and as you learn to pray and depend on God more and more, that you do less damage to others.

17:54

You do less damage to yourself, and you become more complete.

[Pause]

Have you ever felt like there were certain talents and skills that you just really didn't quite have in relating with other people, just like you might or might not have a skill with something else and, well, you needed to grow that.

18:21

I could never catch a ball, and I could never hammer a nail. I was born with crooked eyes. You should have seen me when I was age eight, trying to hammer a nail. My fingers were black and blue. My father spent eight years trying to teach me to play catch.

18:45

I can't see a ball flying in the air. I know it's coming, it's coming straight at me, but I don't know how close or far away it is...so it always hits me in the face.

[Laughter]

And then I hold my hands out in front of me, and it hits my hands and falls on the ground. I finally got, if you're very, very slow, and through girl's softball fashion underhand...maybe I'll catch it.

19:08

OK?

[Pause]

I'm never gonna be a ball player. I came to that realization sometime around age nine. But I can be perfected. I can work on more important stuff than my ability to play catch. I did, actually, by age 21 learn how to use most hand tools.

19:39

...and found a real joy in it, even though I have to measure at least four times instead of the usual twice...and I still don't always saw straight. But the good news is that most of my projects are tucked away in the back of the house where nobody sees them anyway...

19:54

I'm less good at working on friendships. I cherish them deeply, but...there are very few who really understand the pressure a minister goes under. And, so most of my deep friends, including the one who was my best friend, who I buried...have been ministers.

20:23

I don't know about you, but if you're a teacher, or in medical work, or in sales, there are always those pressures. There's always somebody who can help us grow. I like to think that I'm now at the point that I can offer some help...I try not to call it advice...

20:50

I have discovered that, guess what! Grandchildren do not sit at rapt attention around your knees! They're busy. They've got stuff to do, right? The eight-year old has lessons and plans of her own, you know? And, they're not going to just sit here and soak up what we have to offer by osmosis.

21:12

But as we get more perfected...as we have gone through more troubles, survived them, and have some idea of how to get through those things, then we can share that which has perfected us with others. In closing, I want to share with you the dumbest prayer I ever prayed.

21:33

Schtupidest prayer I ever did. I prayed when I was fifteen...now I didn't even have a license yet, OK? I didn't even have a learner's permit. I was running around on my bicycle praying, "Lord, teach me patience!"

[Pause]

Don't ever pray that prayer!

[Laughter]

You know, God teaches you patience...

[Laughter]

I think some of you know already, right?

22:02

You get so aggravated over something...that the next time something else happens, you go, "Eh! No big deal..." I've been...you know...it's like I looked at somebody one time and said, "You think you're a threat? I have news for you...I've been chewed on by professionals!"

22:22

We will get better...and we pray that we will get better as we get older, before we get enough older and forget what we know.

[Laughter]

But you know what? If it's a matter of character, and I can tell you this from family, both sides of our family...when the Alzheimer's hits, character still shows.

22:54

My father-in-law, and my father, were loving, caring men until the minute they died because that's how they had been perfected by living their lives as Christians.

23:15

...even when there was no energy for a voice, the brain was not aware of the current day...they were who they were....and may we be the people God calls us to be.

[True Colours fades in]