

# Biblical Background

MATTHEW 5:38-48

**GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING:** This continues the Sermon on the Mount in Galilee as laid out in the previous few weeks.

**TERMS:** *Enemy* One who was antagonistic towards your tribe, therefore your family, therefore you.

*Just/unjust* The just were ones who were in integrity. There was an inner alignment of their body, mind, heart and soul. Who they are on the inside was who they were on the outside. The unjust are not to be trusted, they lack integrity. Important for safety to distinguish. Yet in God's great love and merciful provision the rain pours and sun shines for both.

*Tax collectors* Those who were delegated by Rome to collect taxes on behalf of Rome in the Jewish State. Most likely operated unjustly, swindlers in our present context.

*Pagans* Those whose communities are not in a relationship with God and connected to the community of believers.

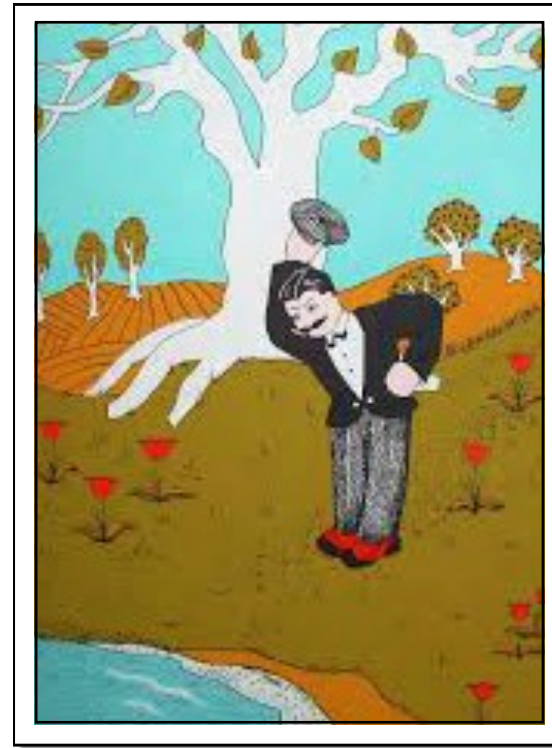
*Be perfect* A better translation is to be whole. Wholeness/holiness is the goal not perfection. Wholeness requires that we be people that get involved in the mess of knocking down walls and building bridges. A puritan vision of perfection does not fit in with the messiness of human relations. God wants us involved to grow wholeness and connection. That can be very messy.

**CULTURAL INSIGHT:** Being struck on the face was something that would happen often given the Middle East and the fiery tempers that is culturally typical. And to give your tunic is a much better idea, than to get to the point to have to give your cloak. A cloak was the outer jacket and would often serve as bedding at night, therefore give two tunics before your cloak is required of you. In other words don't let a dispute get so far that it has to go to court, as you could incur serious shame and lose it all. In going the extra mile it was customary for a soldier to force a civilian to carry their military gear for them up to a mile. It was a humiliation, therefore restore it and regain power by offering to take it two. In each of these instances Jesus offers a path to regain power which is lost through the violence and abuse. Power is regained by surrender and a restoration of will through the offering of one's service. All of this works toward the reestablishment of relationship and unity. A very important element in a tribal culture.

**INSIGHT INTO MEANING:** The understanding of love/hate to this culture is very important in understanding this reading. The Middle Easterner is a group orientated person. Group membership bestows honor upon an individual, and provides a sense of identity and conscience. Apart from one's group a person is nothing. The combination of group orientation and inability to look inside, causes people in this culture to be very concrete in their ways of thinking. Love and hate may be internal human emotions, but Mediterranean's focus exclusively on their external expression. Love is best translated as attachment to the group. Hate is detachment. To love God is to be attached to him. To hate an enemy is to be detached from them. Jesus here urges a more inclusive behavior among members of the in-group. In Jesus' group there is no room for selective attachment and aloofness.

# Family Activities

SHARING THE MISSION AT HOME  
AND IN THE WORLD



**QUESTION OF THE WEEK:** Question of the Week: How can we surrender to people we are having a problem with? How might it work to break down walls and build bridges instead?

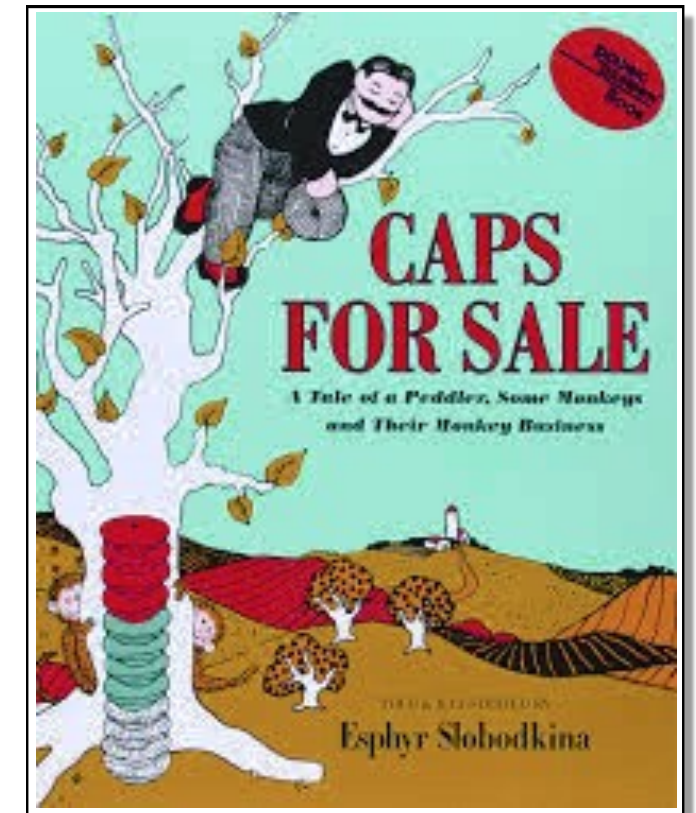
**CHARACTER QUALITIES:** CREATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING  
RESPONDING TO LOVE

**ADDITIONAL FAMILY ACTIVITIES:** Look in the News for stories of people in conflict with each other. Reflect as a family on the nature of the conflict. What are the various positions and hopes of each group? How does the person or group react by building walls? What could surrender look like? Write out an approach as a family as to how you could work with both sides to surrender. Help to construct what each group building bridges together might look like.

# Living Grace

Cycle A 7th Sunday  
Ordinary Time

"ARE WE REACTORS OR REFLECTORS OF GOD'S LOVE?"



*In Caps for Sale, we meet a peddler that sells caps for 50¢ each by strolling through town with the caps stacked on his head. He's had a hard day - no caps sold. He doesn't have any lunch and is tired. He rests sits down under a tree to take a nap, with all his caps still stacked on his head. When he awakens, he realizes all of the caps, except his own checkered cap, have been stolen by a troupe of monkeys, who now sit in the tree wearing them. The peddler orders them to return his caps, scolds them, and yells at them, while the monkeys only imitate him and his angry outbursts. The peddler becomes so frustrated that he finally throws down his own cap in disgust. Unexpectedly, the monkeys then throw their caps down as well, right at his feet. After the monkeys give the peddler back his caps, they leave, and the peddler puts the caps right back on his head, and strolls back to town, once again calling, "Caps! Caps for sale! Fifty cents a cap!"*



DETAIL FROM THE HISTORY OF LOS ANGELES, DIVISION OF THE BARRIOS  
Mural created by various artists & youth ~ 1970's  
Los Angeles, California ~ United States of America

## EXPLORING THE ART:

## STREET ART ENGAGING THE CULTURE

This image is one section of a huge street mural in Los Angeles, originally titled The History of California, now more commonly known as The Great Wall of Los Angeles. It began as a beautification project to decorate a flood-control wall, and was created over the course of 5 summers in the late 1970's, with the help of over 400 community youth and artists coordinated by the Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC). It is painted directly on concrete, and at 13 feet high and 2,754 feet long, covering over six city blocks, it is one of the longest murals in the world.

The mural is a series of connected panels that are placed chronologically in order to tell a story. The first panels begin with prehistory and colonialism, depicting native wildlife, and the creation story of the indigenous Chumash. The subject matter doesn't shy away from uncomfortable aspects of current and past social practices found in the United States as the following panels deal with events of the 20th century, such as the Chinese labor contributions to the United States, the Great Depression, the Japanese-American internment of World War II, the Freedom Bus rides, the disappearance of Rosie the Riveter, gay rights activism, deportations of Mexican-Americans and the birth of Rock and Roll.

"It's not just history, it's really about relationships - about connecting", said Judy Baca who was the artist that coordinated the project. She wanted to show the diversity of the groups of people in the city's history, and how they were able to overcome overwhelming obstacles placed before them - a prime example of what street art is capable of.

# Sunday Gospel

MATTHEW 5:38-48

Jesus said to his disciples:

"You have heard that it was said,  
*an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.*

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 as well.

If anyone wants to go to law with you over your tunic,  
hand over your cloak as well.

Should anyone press you into service for one mile,  
go for two miles.

Give to the one who asks of you,  
and do not turn your back on one who wants to  
borrow.

"You have heard that it was said,  
*you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.*

But I say to you, love your enemies

and pray for those who persecute you,

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.

For if you love those who love you, what recompense  
will you have?

Do not the tax collectors do the same?

And if you greet your brothers only,

what is unusual about that?

Do not the pagans do the same?

So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect."

SURRENDERING TO ACCEPTANCE OF THE OTHER IS THE KEY TO BREAKING DOWN WALLS AND BUILDING BRIDGES.

When the peddler in our children's story throws down his own cap ("throws in the towel") in exasperation with the monkeys, he demonstrates an act of surrender which opens up the door for the monkeys to pause, to reflect, and to follow his example. The man releases a new energy into the situation with his enemies, and it changes the outcome.

In today's gospel Jesus talks about the primitive form of justice described in the Old Testament which was the rule of his times, "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth". In this sermon, he suggests a new way that would have truly shocked his listeners. As usual, Jesus calls us to a much higher form of justice - justice that is rooted in love. He says that we should, "offer no resistance to one who does evil", and even challenges us to extend love and care to them. "If someone takes your cloak, give them the other one; if someone hits you, offer the other cheek as well". This challenge would have seemed as crazy to listeners in the first century as it does to us now. What is Jesus getting to here?

Our children's story helps us understand the response Jesus is inviting to embrace. The peddler argues with the monkeys using many tactics, none which are effective. They are stuck in a polarized conflict with both parties just getting more and more angry. When we finally "throw down our own caps" (or "throw in the towel") we defuse our own anger and the anger in the standoff with our own "enemies". Grace is activated and God's presence is able to enter the situation. The "enemy" is given the invitation to move from an angry reaction, to a reflective response. This act of surrender disarms the enemy, the invitation is extended to move from reaction to response. The situation is elevated from a polarized conflict, to a response bringing about resolution. In today's gospel we are called to love as the Father loves us.

Through Jesus' act of surrender unto death, we stand forgiven, accepted, and embraced by the love of God. Jesus way of surrender works to make the world whole. To be perfect as our heavenly father is perfect, is to offer this kind of unconditional love to everyone, not just our family and friends, but our enemies as well. As we hear from Jesus again and again, it is not about "us" and our own interests. It is about our working with God's grace, in large ways and small, to make this broken world whole.

## Making the Connections

**YOUR STORY:** How do you feel when someone is angry with you? Do you become more opened or closed? Does it make you feel angry or intimidated? Why is "getting even" a harmful idea? Have you seen people trying to get even on the playground? Does it end up being a positive action? What kind of a response does turning the other cheek bring about?

**THE CHILDRENS' STORY:** Do you think the monkeys meant to be harmful? Was losing all the caps harmful for the peddler? For the peddler what happened when he threw down his cap?

**THE GOSPEL STORY:** What is the way of Jesus? How can we be "perfect" in our day as Jesus calls us to? How does this break down walls and build bridges?

To be perfect as our heavenly father is perfect, is to offer this kind of unconditional love to everyone, not just our family and friends, but our enemies as well. As we hear from Jesus again and again, it is not about "us" and our own interests. It is about our working with God's grace, in large ways and small, to make this broken world whole.