Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





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“Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful” (Luke 6:36).

Dn 9:4b-10; Lk 6:36-38

The ancients all had thoughts on how to keep an ethical balance in life. The so-called “Golden Rule” summarized an underlying principle: “Treat others the way you want to be treated.” Being respectful was wise, because, as other axioms held, “What goes around, comes around,” and “You will reap what you sow.”

Jesus seems to have shared in this wisdom tradition, and he also identified the source of this basic law of life in God, who has ordered creation and human morality

with the same mutual benefit. Love begets love. Forgiveness inspires forgiveness. The measure you measure with is the measure you will receive.

But Jesus added a dimension to human morality by making God's infinite generosity and forbearance the measure of our human perfection. "Be merciful as your Father is merciful" was more than *quid pro quo,* which could also justify returning "evil for evil, and eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," another ancient rule.

Jesus extended the principle of love to situations where love is not returned. He counseled his disciples to keep forgiving seven times seventy when offenses are repeated. Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you. Turn the other cheek, go the extra mile. Such radical teachings have been called naïve, utopian and impossible.

What did Jesus have in mind? Perhaps he was proposing for his disciples a new kind of freedom. After all, if we can let go of offenses and move on from the burden of keeping track of the sins of others, imagine just how free we would be.

And it is this freedom from spending our entire domestic budget on defense that enables us to focus on something more important – an encounter with God, the source of love. Jesus wanted his disciples to know God, to live in the gaze of the face of Mercy, to be perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect.

To live in the community of the Beatitudes was Jesus' invitation to live in this world as though heaven were already visible, within reach. To be among the "little ones" who embraced meekness, peace, justice, mercy and purity of heart was to possess the revelation of God that remains hidden from the wise and clever, the learned and the logical. Emily Dickinson captures this truth in her two-verse poem "I had no time to hate."

I had no time to hate, because

The grave would hinder me

And life was not so ample I

Could finish enmity.

Nor had I time to love, but since

Some industry must be,

The little toil of love, I thought,

Was large enough for me.

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