Spirituality
Pencil Preaching



by Pat Marrin

View Author Profile
patrickjmarrin@gmail.com.

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

June 13, 2022

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint



“Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt 5:43).

1 Kgs 21:17-29; Mt 5:43-48

If you had stopped to listen to Jesus of Nazareth as he preached his Sermon on the Mount, his eloquence and emphasis on love may have held your attention for a while. The Beatitudes have the dreamy quality of Zen poetry. Who doesn’t want to be blessed, innocent, humble, idealistic and peaceful, even at a cost? Salt of the earth, light of the world? Yes. Keep the spirit of the law? Get to the essence of the commandments? Of course.

But then the demands and the sacrifices. Turn the other cheek, walk the extra mile, lend freely without expecting repayment! The extreme imagery of plucking out your eye or cutting off your hand to avoid sin! This must be just hyperbole, metaphor.

Who could be this radical, this heroic, or this fanatical?

Then the clincher. “Love your enemies and pray for those who hurt you.” No way! This challenges our deepest instincts, undermines the whole social contract, the only deterrent we have as people compete for scarce resources, trying to survive in a world of winners and losers. The Law of the Talon: An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. I am friend to my friends, enemy to my enemies. This is how the *real* world works.

Who is this Jesus, and who are his disciples, being sent without money, shoes or provisions to preach to strangers, like lambs among wolves to announce forgiveness and love? What would ever convince anyone to live like that?

The prize, it turns out, is the most amazing gift possible, to be like God, and therefore to be a child of God. For this is exactly the way God is, loving the good and bad alike, sending sunshine and rain in equal measure on saints and sinners alike.

The world will descend into brutality unless it ascends toward blessing. The Sermon on the Mount is not an invitation to Utopia; it is the only way human beings will survive and rise up out of relentless self-destruction toward the promise of a common good built on truth, respect, justice and peace. How many cycles of violent regression will it take to convince us to give peace a chance? How many wars do we need to know the futility of aggression and dominance as a way to solve problems?

To be friends with God, bearing the image and likeness of God, is to recover our true nature, our reason for being, our real place within the web of life whose destination is the Beloved Community, life with God. If we stay long enough at the edge of the crowd listening to Jesus, we may want to stick around long enough to see if this isn’t what we’ve been looking for all along. Who else has touched our hearts this deeply and this convincingly?

Advertisement