

Psalm 37:1-11
Luke 6:27-38

Beyond Expectations
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Most of us grew up with the Golden Rule: *Do unto others as you would have them do unto you*” (verse 36 of our text from Luke). We learned it or some variation thereof. However as I read our text for today I wonder if we should change it. Maybe it should be more like, *Do more than others expect you to do*. Jesus is calling us to set a higher standard than the world expects. A standard we all fail to meet.

We need to be better than the world, according to Jesus. The world does love those who love. The world does do good to those that do good. This is the basic norm of our societies. The world understands the adage: “An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth...” (Ex. 21:34). In fact, probably most Christians agree more with this than with the new norms that Jesus puts into place for those who would be his followers. We long for grace for ourselves and judgment for others.

I got an email from a friend a few weeks ago. The email listed things that happen to illegal aliens in various countries around the world. In most you go to jail or get immediately deported back to where you came from. The email went on to list possible consequences of being an “illegal” in the United States. You get a driver’s license, a job, etc. Now I am not sure what type of a response they were hoping for but as I read it I kept saying to myself, “of course, we are a Christian nation this is how we are supposed to be.” This should be a call to praise not a call to arms! We go beyond the expectations of the world.

What does Jesus say? He says we should go the extra mile, we should go beyond the world’s expectations. We are to love our enemies. We do good to those who would hate us. We bless them who curse us. Now, when was the last time you were cursed? How did you respond? Did you curse back or did you send back a blessing?

An easy way to get a group quiet is to start talking quietly. At camp when we wanted the campers to quiet down usually one of the guitar players would start playing a song quietly and soon all the campers would be gathered around trying to hear what he/she was singing. Rather than shouting them down they were silenced by the quiet notes of a song. A blessing rather than a curse.

Then Jesus goes on to say that if we are slapped on the cheek we don’t slap back but turn the other cheek! (This is a tough one.) And if someone takes your coat give them your shirt also. These are not the standards of the world. They go beyond the expectations of any society.

Why? Because we reap what we sow. Rather than judging – let God do it. God is better at it than we are anyway. Rather than condemning leave the situation up to God. Again God is better at it than we are. And, forgive because we have been forgiven. Love because we have been loved. Be Christ-like in all of our actions toward all people – not just those who are like us.

We must move beyond the expectations of the world. We need to be weird? In the adult class last Sunday we had a discussion about personal witnessing. Some how we got on the subject of television programs and their morality or lack thereof. My response was that I am not bothered a whole lot by them... I don’t expect much more from the world. After all it is the world. However when I see those same responses coming from the Church then I get disturbed.

For instance, the national news this past week recorded the capture of a leading figure in the Taliban. Along with his capture a national news person was shown saying that this person should be taken out and shot. Now this person appeals to the religious right of our

nation and thus, in some ways represents them. Here is the “eye for an eye...” theology coming through loud and clear. But this is NOT the response Jesus calls for. His call is that we love our enemies. We bless those who would curse us. How are we any different from the world if our response is the response of the world?

Also, this week had a news report of a “tea bagger” saying that she would like to hang Washington State Senator Murray. Why? Because she does not agree with Senator Murray’s politics. I would image that the “tea bagger” would probably identify herself as Christian and would see this as a Christian response to the situation. Where is grace? Where is love for one’s enemies? Where are the representatives of the risen Christ in all of this?

We are called to be different. We are called to change the world. To be weird. A friend listed a blog on their blog of a Christian group whose blog is dedicated to criticizing other Christians. They are especially critical of Christians who are in dialogue with non-Christians. They are not open to anyone dialoguing with those of other faiths. They are doing nothing more than what the world often does. Some days the world may be more open than the church.

Jesus calls for a higher standard than the standard of the world. We are called to go beyond the expectations of the world. We are asked to go the extra mile—to do more than is expected of us. We are asked to move beyond the norms of the world and introduce them to the norms of love found in God’s kingdom.

No, we cannot do this in our own strength. God already knows this and does not expect us to do it in our own strength. But we can love through the Spirit – through the One God has provided to walk with us. We can love if we allow God’s love to flow through us. We are never asked to do it in our own strength but in the strength of the One who has called and equipped us. Jesus put it this way, “*Be merciful just as your Father is merciful*” (Luke 6:36 NIV).

God does not ask us to do what God is not willing to do. We forgive because we have been forgiven. We love because we have been loved – even when we were not worthy of that love (and we never are). We are redeemed not by our deeds but by God’s grace. We are called to extend that grace to all. We are empowered by the Holy Spirit to go far beyond the expectations of the world.

Is it not time to expand the Golden rule? Time to move beyond the norms and values of the world and adopt the norms and values of the kingdom of God. God surprised the world with a depth of love the world did not expect—an only son. Lent reminds us of the journey from Bethlehem to Calvary and of the One who made that journey. God surprised the world and it is time that those who name the Name also begin to surprise the world. It is time we begin to live our lives beyond the expectations of the world.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quoted is from NRSV, NCCC/USA 1989
NIV, New International Bible Society, Zondervan, 1989
Yancey, Philip, Prayer, Zondervan, 2006