

Retribution

Interpretation: Part 1 “Retribution”

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – July 10, 2022

5th Sunday After Pentecost

Readings: Leviticus 24:17-22; 1 Peter 3:8-12; Matthew 5:38-42

Reflection: Psalm 70

Greeting: The Lord has told us what is good and right. The Lord requires of us that we are to do justice. The Lord our God calls us to love kindness. We are to walk humbly with our God! Praise the Lord! (*Micah 6:8*)

Prayer: O God, our Guide and Guardian, you have led us away from the stress and the strain of the world to be in your peaceful presence. Grant us grace to worship you in Spirit and in truth. May we find comfort in your love and may you build us up by your faith. Enable us to do the work that you have called us to, without fear of failure or hesitation to do good. May we worship you, not just with our lips this hour, but in word and deed all the days of our lives; through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 70

Be pleased, O God, to deliver me. O Lord, make haste to help me! Let those be put to shame and confusion who seek my life. Let those be turned back and brought to dishonor who desire to hurt me. Let those who say, “Aha, Aha!” turn back because of their shame. Let all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you. Let those who love your salvation say evermore, “God is great!” But I am poor and needy; hasten to me, O God! You are my help and my deliverer; O Lord, do not delay! (Psalm 70 NRSVue)*

We read the words of Psalm 70 and hear of God’s deliverance. That we are to seek the Lord in all things. That God’s salvation is there for those who seek it. We hear the call to rejoice in the Lord. How do you rejoice in God’s salvation? How do you celebrate God’s love in your life? How do you share in that love with others? Do you call on the Lord to deliver you in times of trouble? Do you pray for others in their time of need? How else do you help others in the name of the Lord? How do we celebrate God together?

Prayer: O God, you are our hope and our praise. Help us to seek your wisdom in all that we are and do. May we be strengthened by your steadfast love and faithfulness as we come before you in prayer this day. Help us Lord, that you lift us up in both our joys and our sorrows. Be with us in both our laughter and our tears. May your light guide us and lead us to life everlasting, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today comes from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading for today comes from Leviticus chapter 24 verses 17 through 22.

Anyone who kills a human being shall be put to death. Anyone who kills an animal shall make restitution for it, life for life. Anyone who maims another shall suffer the same injury in return: fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; the injury inflicted is the injury to be suffered. One who kills an animal shall make restitution for it, but one who kills a human being shall be put to death. You shall have one law for the alien and for the native-born, for I am the Lord your God.”
(Leviticus 24:17-22 NRSVue*)

Our next reading for today comes from 1 Peter chapter 3 verses 8 through 12.

Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse, but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called—that you might inherit a blessing. For “Those who desire to love life and to see good days, let them keep their tongues from evil and their lips from speaking deceit; let them turn away from evil and do good; let them seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.” (1 Peter 3:8-12 NRSVue*)

Our first reading for today comes from the gospel according to Matthew chapter 5 verses 38 through 42.

[Jesus said] “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you: Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also, and if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, give your coat as well, and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. Give to the one who asks of you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.” (Matthew 5:38-42 NRSVue*)

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

Today’s readings are not exactly in harmony. We find a clear contradiction of the Old Testament law. Part of our purpose in this series is to look at the interpretation of the law and understanding of it through Christ. We often have a temptation to believe that everything in the Bible is in harmony with itself and that there are no contradictions; that there is no conflict. And the reason I point this out is because when we can openly accept that there are contradictions and conflicts within the text, it helps us to gain a better understanding of the Bible itself as the unique work that it is, compiled over time and interpreted over an even greater time. What we see in our opening from Leviticus is a declaration that anything done will have an equal retribution. If you kill an animal, you have to make restitution. If you harm another, you suffer in

the same way, fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, injury for injury, life for life. One law for everyone to be followed by all. This is called into question when we come to our gospel reading for today. This is one of the many teachings that begins with Jesus talking about what had been said before. Jesus then quotes our passage from Leviticus, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Christ turns this idea on its head, and it suddenly becomes return evil with good. Don't fall into the same trap but be better. Don't resist an evildoer. If anyone strikes you on the right cheek, offer them the left cheek as well. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, give them your coat. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. You could be conscripted by Roman soldiers to go a mile in service, so this goes beyond what they can enforce. What we see in this is not just a pacifist reaction that we often attribute to turning the other cheek. This concept is changing the idea of retribution under the law but also combining it with a reclaiming of dignity and power. We get an echo of all of this in First Peter. We are called not to repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse, but to repay with a blessing and you will receive a blessing.

Now the first and I think the most obvious thing that we have to look at with this is the fact that we have Jesus clearly disagreeing with the law as it's written in Leviticus. There are all sorts of ways that we could write this off, but I think the easiest thing to do is just to say that there is conflict with the law as recorded and the way Christ is calling us to live it out. That we are more than people who need retribution, that we can be better. Instead of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, if someone means you harm, show them good in return. Step up and be better. And I don't want us to take this too lightly either. Because we often know this upon reading the Old Testament account. That we have already heard Christ's words on this matter, so it doesn't come as a big surprise to us. We don't experience the shift away from living under the law of retribution with Christ upending that idea. We often come into this already knowing what Jesus taught and that being our initial teaching. The problem with that is that it downplays the change that's actually happening here. And in turn, we downplay the significance. We have a new interpretation that alters the way that the law is to be lived out. And that's a pretty major thing. Because it no longer means a life for life, an injury for an injury, retribution for every action. It means there is a new focus on forgiveness and introspection. Not making sure that everyone gets what they give, but that we can give better than we receive.

Now, there is a secondary aspect to this. And I touched on that a little bit earlier. There is some power being reclaimed in this situation and that reclaiming is twofold. When Jesus declares that the old ways are not the ways that people should live out the law, he invites them into a better way. This new way is a benefit personally but is also a way that takes the power away from those inflicting harm while not being called to stoop to their level. Instead, we are called to turn the other cheek. Now, as I said before, we often hear this as a call to pacifism that can easily get over simplified. If we are called to turn the other cheek, it isn't just a simple call to nonviolence. We can dive a little deeper into this idea. That if someone strikes you on the right cheek, don't let them feel like they have power over you because of what they have done

to you. Freely offer the other one as well and remove the power of their actions. What power does it have if they can strike you if you willingly invite them to strike you on the other cheek as well? Again, what power does anyone hold if they demand your shirt, and you freely offer them your cloak as well? No longer do they hold power over you because of their action. You have taken that power back for yourself in showing that your power is not in retribution but in kindness. It's the same with if someone wants to make you go a mile. Go a second just to show them that you're willing to go above and beyond what they thought they could force you to do. And in this way, it's not just the classic nonviolence for the sake of nonviolence that we often hear associated with this passage. Instead, it is also a reclaiming of power without having to claim power in the way that people normally do. And by doing this, Christ offers us all a way to be able to show that we are stronger than our base impulses, that we are better than our need for revenge. That we need not to serve evil with evil just to be able to survive. Instead, we become a people who value those who can do good even in trying times. Those who, instead of standing up to violence with violence, find that they may stand up to violence with the strength of God. Those who need not inflict more violence and perpetuate an already broken system, but those who are willing to do the work themselves to make a better world.

Christ challenges all of us, his listeners then and his listeners today, to be better. He interprets the law in a way that gives us a better path. We are not to assume that the only way for anything to work is to be able to stoop as low as the other guy will go. Instead, it is that all of us need to be willing to ask if this is the right thing to do. Not what we have been told, not what we might have believed about how to treat others or how they treat us. Not that we need to inflict violence upon those who inflict violence on us. Christ gives us the strength so that we can rise above that most basic call for revenge and be a people of hope. That when someone wants to try to bring us down to their level, we rise above. When someone wants to take control through oppression, we rise above. When someone wants to bring us down to their level and make us live by the rules that they have decided upon, we rise above. That we are not called to be a people who always seek revenge but a people who offer forgiveness. Not a people who seek retribution but a people who reclaim power through compassion. That we can demonstrate that we are more than simply a need to be the best a need to feel powerful but finding that true power comes from being able to do good in the face of evil. And so, when Jesus changes this and reinterprets the law he's offering us the better path, the better way. The way for all of us to be able to live and learn together without always resorting to bloodshed and violence, without always resorting to having to take an eye for an eye until the whole world is blind. Showing that true power comes from the strength we find in Christ to repay harm with care. That we can face evil with good and always rise above, so that we may be God's children and a people of hope. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – Interpretation

Our current series will be looking at the ways that we interpret Scripture. Each week will be a different lesson that will look at the Old and New Testament and what we learn about them both through Christ.

Prayer List

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Patti Corder and the Greenup Ambulance Crew		Eric Veach	Ed & Verna Titus
Henry Catey	Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney	Nancy Hoke
Family of Don Wells	Tricia Adkins	Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead
Dwight Parsons	Lauren Stewart	Phyllis Gabel	Sage Martin
Dalton McFarland	Ruth Ann Finley	Jodie Bunch	Tom Finley
Laura Carlen	Rosie Chancellor	Susie Callahan	Kenny Holmes
Chuck Hogan	Brittany Gilbert	Jackie Potter	Don Holsapple
Family of Loise Roberts	Jeremy Klinger	Phil Hawickhorst	Doris Miller
Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Wayne Carrell	Gary & Mary Winterrowd
Leo Smith	Sue & Bob Smyser	Larry Thompson	Nick & Leana Ochoa
Family of Bunny Sparks	Greg Williams	Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter
Paul Schulte			

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