

## Sermon for February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2014

### Seventh Sunday after Epiphany, Matthew 5:38-48

BLESSINGS TO YOU AND PEACE FROM GOD THE FATHER, OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

This week before the sermon begins we are going to do something **a bit** different. A **couple** of weeks ago one of our members, **Schera Harner**, asked me if she could get up and **speak** about something close to her heart. **Knowing** what she wanted to talk about I told her '*alright*'. I felt the **sermon** time would be the best opportunity for her to speak.

For those of you who do not know Schera she has been a member of Eden for a couple of years now, she is a member of the **Helping Hands** ministry, she has been a **quilter**, she is on our **church council**, and she is someone who has a **servant's heart**. As commendable as all those things she does for our Eden family are Schera is so much more than that.

This morning I **invite her** to come up here and speak to us for a couple of moments and tell us some of her story. Schera.....

I **thank you** for coming up and letting us hear a bit of a different side of an issue we know something about here at Eden. I know it is **not always easy** to come before the congregation and tell the **personal** side of our stories.

As God's Spirit would have it this morning in our **gospel** reading we read,  
*“Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you. But I say to you, ‘Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven...’”*

In **our** area with the amount of homeless we have we have just heard that giving **money** to those who beg from us is not always the best course of action. **Even** though the homeless and people in need here in Riverside ought not to be seen as our ‘enemy’, as I feel that is **too harsh a word**, I wonder—do they ‘persecute’ us?? Well.....I guess that depends upon **how** you define ‘persecution’.

Here at Eden we **certainly** have had our **issues** with the people who live on the streets. I am **sure** you remember last year when we had to replace our air conditioning system for the sanctuary. We also had to replace 2 air conditioners on our other buildings as well because of copper wiring being stolen. We had to go to the expense of having cages built around each of these units so the same thing would not happen again. Many of you **may or may not** know this; but as recently as a couple of weeks ago we found out that there were homeless people ‘**living**’ on our roof—backpacks and all—back by the **T-Mobile** cage, one day a woman wanted to **use our hose to take a bath**, and the list goes on as to our ‘**issues**’ with the homeless in our area.

My question for us this morning is: *How do we live out the words that Jesus has for us when we have been subject to theft and violation from the **same** people (our neighbors) that we are called to serve? I do not think* that Jesus' words call for us to allow acts of vandalism to happen time after time without us being **proactive and being good stewards** of our property.

**Although;** as disciples of Jesus, it says we are called to love others because that is how God loves us. We read that God makes the **sun shine** on the evil and the good, He **sends rain** to the righteous and to the unrighteous. What **reward** is ours if we **only love** those **who love us**? This is not an easy question to answer.

Once again this week in our **gospel** reading Jesus is calling us to do the really hard work of the kingdom. Turning our cheek when someone offends us, if someone wants to sue us we are to give them all we have. Then the **clincher**, the **bottom line** of this whole teaching is, *'Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.'* In other words, *'Love unconditionally as God loves unconditionally.'* Sometimes it is a challenge.

I **really** believe in this situation with the homeless we **are** doing the **loving** thing. This is why. Over the course of the last year our congregation has been **called to love and care for** many people in need. **Each** week we make **50 lunches** which go to LSS to feed the hungry at Genesis house, our **quilters** have given away over 220 quilts, we support **families at Christmas** through gifts and

donations, we purchased Target and Walmart gift cards for **Path of Life** homeless ministry, we gave hundreds of **pairs of shoes** to the Steppin on Up agency, we **filled a U-haul** trailer full of donated clothes and took it to the Pine Ridge reservation in South Dakota to help keep people warm in this bitter cold winter they have had. **Each** month I am supplied with **food cards** to give out to the needy people who come here. Many of them are homeless or may have a place to live but have no food to eat. I have **faith** that we here at Eden love God's people unconditionally.

I **also** believe the city of Riverside has implemented some good policies which address the homeless population through their '*Give to positive change*' initiative. As a matter of the fact, I just received this flyer in my email from the city. It is about a **walk** on April 12<sup>th</sup>. I believe **saying 'no'** to the needy and homeless when there are **positive** alternatives in place is not being unchristian nor does it go against what Jesus was teaching.

People of **Jesus' time** did not understand the words '*love*' and '*hate*' in terms of emotional states, feelings, or attitudes. For them '*to love*' their enemies did not mean to **try and feel affection** for them. It meant: to **join in their fate**, to **seek for their welfare** as well as **work for their fair and just treatment**. I am **confident** that we do have a sense of wanting the best for the neighbors we serve which is what Jesus has **called us to do**—to **see God** in our neighbor just as we

can see **God** in one another. **Loving them** and wanting the **best for them**.

**Loving our neighbor** as ourselves is shown when God's generous and unrestricted grace, mercy, and love is lived out among all God's people. **AMEN.**