

Maybe you were like this – maybe not but when I was a teenager and my mother would tell me to do something – there was a fierce force of resistance that rose inside me. My mother was a little intimidating so I never outright rebelled, instead I would roll my eyes, drag myself to the task and do it with such a chip on my shoulder that it took twice the time it should have.

Even worse was being told twice – ‘I know, I know....I was just going to do it.’ On our way to Winchester, we pass the big Woburn Post Office. Carol will sometimes ask me to swing in so we can mail something. I’m mature now – I recognize being asked rather than being told. But almost without exception as we near the turn for the Post Office, Carol waves the envelopes in my face, “don’t forget the Post Office.” and I feel that force of resistance rise in me, and I am 15 again. I hate it so much that I try to co-opt her by saying, “if you wave those envelopes at me, I’m just going to keep driving.” This has the effect of threatening her and reassuring at the same time. Even the last time Carol was holding mail in her lap - probably doing some kind of meditation chant to keep from waving them – I said to myself, “If she waves those envelopes at me, I’m driving right by.”

Now maybe I’m a little on the immature side, but there is something about being told what to do that we don’t like. Especially if the person telling you what to do has power over you. That was the case in Jesus’ time – Roman soldiers were, by law, able to force someone to carry their pack or their armor for a mile. It didn’t matter if you were going in the entirely opposite direction, if you were frail or injured. You had to obey him – and I bet any eye rolling or foot dragging was probably internal.

When Jesus began this sermon, he reassured his disciples that he did not come to abolish the law – he came to fulfill it. Most of these commandments came from the Torah. They were laws intended to order society – no community can survive, much less grow, if injury goes unpunished. A lawless society would leave the vulnerable unprotected, at the mercy of the strong, of those bold enough to seize power and jealously hold onto it.

In the book of Exodus, the ten commandments are followed by laws; laws that were based on reciprocity. “the injury inflicted shall be the injury suffered.” ²³ you shall give life for life, ²⁴ eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, ²⁵ burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.” In Deuteronomy it says 21 Show no pity: “

The theory was that such a balance of injury would wipe out the original offense. But in reality it increased the injury rather than lessening it. It was the law and as such, injuries were swapped, armor was carried and clothing given as payment of a lawsuit. It was how society was ordered. You get what you deserve, you get what you have inflicted. Instead of one wounded person we have two. Instead of one heart boiling with righteousness, we have two. An eye for an eye does help to order society. The fear of losing an eye is a mighty powerful deterrent. It was an ordered society, but it wasn't love behind the restraint. It was fear.

Jesus fulfills the law by asking us to act out of love, not fear. To love even our enemies - to not return hurt for hurt. What Jesus asks is simple - it is not wrapped up in dogma and descriptions of who to love and who not to. It is simple and straightforward. But it isn't easy. I try to live this way - to not hold back, to not hold on. But I find if I've given twice what was asked, I secretly expect to be thanked, recognized. If no 'thank you' is forthcoming, I may not snarl, but I walk away with a little resentment. Just the expectation of reward, sets me up to be facing away from love.

But as long as I'm 'trying' to do this; to do this, I am bound to fail. What Jesus is asking of us, is not to do something. He is asking us to be something, to be someone; to be Christians. This kind of love is possible because Jesus turned the world upside down. He was dead. He was resurrected. He overcame death so that we might be able to overcome our sharp tongues and hard hearts. He is not telling us what to do, that was the way of the law. He is fulfilling the law; enabling us to fulfill it. On our own, we are just people trying to be "good" or nice. With Jesus, we are part of something.

I've told this story before but, well, I'm telling it again. A long while ago I had been having a very contentious relationship with a colleague. We had a particularly upsetting and frustrating meeting. As usual, we closed in prayer - and I found I couldn't stop the tape of resentment in my head - so I asked Jesus to come into the room - as a way to deal with my feelings. What happened next changed everything. In my mind's eye, I saw Jesus come into the room, but he didn't stand beside me or behind me, as I expected. He stood behind the chair of my troublesome colleague. Instantly my feelings melted as I realized that we were both beloved of God that just as I felt misused and abused - so too may my colleague have felt.

God makes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends the rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. So, when we invite Jesus into our relationships we better be prepared for some surprises. God will not take our side against another of God's children. Nor, will God stand with others against us. It occurs to me that maybe Jesus WAS standing behind me in that room that day. I know that what I experienced was a Kingdom moment.

And that's what we're doing – building the Kingdom of God, working toward a world where love prevails – Your Kingdom Come – we pray. Well, these instructions are the major building blocks of that Kingdom. I chose to use this Version of the scripture, the one that Laurie read, because I wanted the familiar words of "An eye for an eye". But what I'd like to leave you with are the words from *the Message*. Where our translation ends: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly father is perfect". The Message says, "In a word, what I'm saying is, Grow up. You're kingdom subjects. Now live like it. Live out your God-created identity. Live generously and graciously toward others, the way God lives toward you."