

“What Makes You Unique?”—Matthew 5:43-48

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “What Makes You Unique?”, is Matthew 5:43-48 → Jesus said: *You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father Who is in heaven. For He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Opportunities for teaching God’s Word abound in so many unusual situations. Years ago I was helping a group of eighth grade confirmands prepare for reciting from memory the questions contained in Luther’s Small Catechism before the congregation on Confirmation Sunday. During this “drilling” session the discussion came up about “dragging” main street—what appeared to be the most common pastime in town for teenagers. I told them

I dragged main one time in my life when I was a teenager and couldn't see the point of it.

They concluded that they needed to teach pastor how to drag main properly in order to have some fun. So we all piled in my jeep and headed a block down the street for my "dragging main street lesson." They informed me of the importance of waving and greeting people while driving so I started waving at people to greet them. However, I was quickly chided by my "teachers" that I was doing it all wrong. "You don't wave at everybody, pastor!"

"No?" I responded. "Then to whom am I supposed wave?"

"You only wave at the 'cool' people."

This threw me into confusion as I tried to figure out who was "cool," why they were considered to be "cool" and how I was supposed to tell who was "cool" or . . . not "cool?" If I remember correctly, they weren't much help with defining "cool" either.

Whenever confusion persists we turn to the Word of God. So, I said to them, "Open up the glove compartment." After getting it open I told them to take out the Bible and turn to Matthew 5 and read out loud verse 47. One of the youth read the words: "If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?"

I asked them, "Doesn't Jesus tell us there that we should greet everyone,

not just the ‘cool’ people?” After a little discussion they concluded that they should be greeting everybody, which they did for the rest of the “dragging main street lesson.” They discovered that doing things Jesus’ way involves behaving and thinking in a unique manner.

What is it that make you unique? While many people would immediately turn to individual characteristics like fingerprints, genes and personality, Jesus immediately turns to behavior in the midst of relationships—relationship with Him as our Lord and Savior reflected in relationship with others around us.

Throughout His Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5 Jesus brought out some unique perspectives of behavior in connection to various commandments contained in the Old Testament Law. In our text He focused on Yahweh’s command in Leviticus 19:18 → *You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am Yahweh.* Out of this command the teaching of hatred for those outside of the faith eventually arose. Such teaching had even been found in the Dead Sea Scrolls and they very likely could have heard it taught by the Pharisees or teachers of the law. Thus Jesus’ words in verse 43 of our text: *You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.”*

Love for your neighbor who is a fellow brother or sister in the faith may be

much simpler to fathom than love for your enemy. While the Christian has no enemies but one—the devil (cf. 1 Peter 5:8-9)—Jesus defined the sort of enemy to which He was referring in verse 44 of our text when He said, *love your enemies and **pray for those who persecute you***. In His great love and grace Jesus died for all people, even those who hated Him! Throughout His earthly ministry He made it clear that the devil was the enemy, not people. You *pray for those who persecute you* and try to hurt you because you are unique in that you belong to Jesus as *sons of your Father Who is in heaven!* (verse 45). The reason they are attacking you is because they need Jesus and don't realize their need. In 1 Timothy 2:1-4 we are commanded to pray, even that *thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, **Who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*** Prayer for your enemies is crucial for their coming *to the knowledge of the truth* and faith in Christ Jesus! It is an expression of the heart of Jesus in you for them!

The temptation of the world around you is to retaliate and return evil for evil. Such temptation easily arouses our own sinful hearts to make sin placed upon us breed more and more sin. Before we know it, we are no longer acting

as people who live in a unique relationship with Jesus as our Lord and Savior. We look and act like the sinful world around us.

In our text Jesus is calling His “sons” to a higher standard of behavior unique from the world around them. You are His “sons.” Galatians 3:26-27 says: *In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.* With His examples in verses 46-47 of our text of loving and greeting only those who love and greet you, He is describing the unique behavior of His children. In this unique relationship with God the Holy Spirit moves us to forgive rather than fight back in retaliation; to respond with words that are gracious (cf. Colossians 4:6) rather than react with abuse words intended to crush a person’s spirit (cf. Ephesians 4:29); to protect them rather persecute them in return.

However, in verse 48 He places before us the ultimate expression of this unique relationship: *You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.* Your response to this command reflects the ultimate uniqueness of your being *sons of your Father Who is in heaven*. No, this uniqueness is not found in your efforts to perform the commands of God perfectly. While many would naturally hear the command *be perfect* and assume it has to do with perfect behavior, Jesus’ command hits deeper than such surface perfection. His command is actually about faith in the One Who was perfect **for you**.

Throughout this sermon Jesus' words hit deep to the sinful hearts of people who find it impossible to act as He describes. Since *all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*, **all** must be *justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*. (cf. Romans 3:23-24) The most important, needed unique behavior of the children of God is to drop to your knees in total helplessness, confess your sins to God, admit your inability to be perfect and trust in Jesus Christ. **He** lived in perfect obedience to God's Law **for you!** **He** was the perfect sacrifice necessary to take away the eternal punishment of hell which you deserve! **He** rose from the dead **for you** to give you eternal life in relationship with our heavenly Father!

What make you unique as God's son? The humility and repentance which accompanies being filled with God's Spirit! He empowers you to walk humbly yet confidently, even while knowing you cannot behave perfectly according to God's commands. Your uniqueness is found in the crucified Christ in Whom you have "lost" your life (cf. Matthew 16:25) for a whole new perspective, attitude and way of living with those around you. You are not perfect but you are uniquely and perfectly forgiven in Christ Jesus. Amen.

*You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation,  
a people for God's own possession,  
that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him*

*Who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.*

(1 Peter 2:9)

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