

“Jesus Edits the Law”

February 12, 2017

Several times, in today’s passage from Mt, Jesus remarks,

“You have heard it said,” citing the TORAH,
“but I say,” and then offers a revised edition.



And, he puts an exclamation mark on today’s piece from his Sermon on the Mount... saying,

“You must, therefore, set no bounds on your love as God has none either.”

Elsewhere in his Gospel, when a Pharisee asks him what the greatest commandment is, Matthew’s Jesus answers,

“You shall love Yahweh God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, the greatest and 1st commandment... the 2nd is like it: you shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two hang all the law and the prophets.”

To which he & his colleagues respond... reluctantly,

“Excellent! Superb! Magnificent master!”

Is that as demanding as the injunction at the end of his sermon; how much more does he ask of us there?

“You must therefore set no bounds to your love... just as God has none on his,”

as unbounded as God’s love? Gimme a break!

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I already love God! I love God very much! Though, when a crisis comes along with no immediate solution at hand:

*I get bent out of shape, I scream and I holler!
I yell at everyone! I even get angry with God.*

And when these crises settle down - somehow resolving themselves - I know God’s hand was involved because my Lord loves me very much.

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I already love my family. I love my family very much.

And, when I go out and make a lush of myself & wreck the family car - or blow the grocery money,

all I need to do is say, “I’m sorry,” and they’ll get over it... because they love me very much.

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I already love my neighbours. I love them very much.

I go so far as to write “love” before my name at the bottom of every memo I send my neighbours at the office; and when they truly think I love them, I realize how much I really don’t,

and that is when I tell them face to face that I love them, and they’ll understand too... because they love me very much.

I already love my church. I love my church very much.

In addition to my regular tithe I give five bucks a week to the church's renovation fund because I want a beautiful place to pray; but if the usher seats me next to you-know-who, I get upset and cuss him under my breath, I even forget to pray,

and I tell everyone after the Service and they all smile... because they love me very much.

I already love my country. I love my country very much.

I'd die for my country. But when it's tax time, I get very insulted, I kick up a storm, I clench my fist, I vow to fight the auditor to the finish,

and then I reconsider and I pay my taxes, fudging only a little... because I know my country's legal system will defend my freedoms... because she loves me very much.

I already love myself. I love myself very much.

I make absolutely sure I am 1st everywhere I go, so that all my wants and pleasures are satisfied:

I love my junk foods, my cigarettes, my liquor, my sugar, my fat, my salts, my pills & my drugs; and then I'll get sick, and I'll blame everything on God, family, neighbour, church and country, but never me - because I love myself very much.

It's then that the word "love" should take a break... a day off... a long vacation, because that word "love" has become so over-used... over-worked... over-done, that it isn't meaning what it says anymore.

Here's how Jesus puts it in his re-editing of the Law:

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor & hate your enemy.'

"But I say to you, 'Love your enemies.

Pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of God in heaven; whose sun rises on the evil & the good, whose rain falls on the just & the unjust.'

For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have?



Do not even the tax collectors do the same? Embracing only your near & dear ones... what more are you doing than anybody else is? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?'

With all the RW political rhetoric supported by traditional evangelicals south of us... I've yet to hear this text cited!

Some leadership candidates from our own right-wing party are starting to spout a similar agenda:

"Check 'em out! See if their values are same like us before they get in."

Oh... but Jesus didn't mean for us to love terrorists, religious extremists and social psychopaths!

PAUSE

Perhaps for our love to be as unbounded as God's is to be like my grandchildren, Baxley, Emke & Dagmar, when asked,

"How much do you love nanny?"

Without hesitation - spontaneously & joyfully - their arms spread wide apart over their heads, far back as they can, with a big grin, *"So much."*



There's no fence on my grands' love for nanny. One might say, *"That is just how children are."* But you'd be wrong. It's not true for all children.

If a child is in an environment where they receive unconditional love within their own family setting, with a firm foundation of compassionate nurturing, they have the confidence to "love" in the same way.

If not they will find it difficult to trust others, difficult to respond as my grand-children do.

Love and trust do not come naturally but rather they are learned behaviour.

A colleague for whom I have a great deal of respect once put it this way... let me draw a picture for you:



"We have these dogs inside us, each of them eager for supremacy: one, bouncing around, tail wagging, its tongue out just yearning for a hug,

the other, however, snapping and snarling and yanking on its chain, seems to be bent on devouring us, at the first opportunity. Which dog am I going to feed?"



Still, most children have an advantage over adults as they are not yet injured by worldly experiences, that lead to mistrusting their fellow human beings.

"Abuse me once... and you are the fool. But abuse me twice, and I am the fool!"

Jewish lore of Jesus' time required one to forgive another's missteps seven times; but, when asked by his disciples, Jesus suggests more... *"70 x 7."*

Trust in God, and trust God is present in others, then it becomes more and more possible for us.

"To set no bounds to our love, just as God has none on his."

Unless you come as a child... you can not participate in the economy of God, Amen!