



This is how Jesus illustrated what he meant by blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness and those who are merciful: Read Matthew 5:38-48.



Some say that you can tell what is important to a culture by the number of different words there are for a topic in their language. In the ancient world, there were several words for love. Each word had a different connotation so that 'love' would be understood properly. The dominant words in classic Greek were eros – the emotion of love, philios – the love for a brother or sister, and agape – the love that God has for people, and people for their God.

Last Sunday we looked at Jesus' teaching about adultery and divorce. I indicated that Jesus made the shift from laws and lust to a higher standard of relationship. Jesus was talking about relationships using the Greek meaning of 'philios' love rather than 'eros' love. He called for marriage and friendship with the understanding of the love one has for a brother or sister or for a best friend - a deeper caring for the person than one that simply responds to passions and is limited by law.

In today's passages, Jesus moves the bar even higher. Jesus uses images of Godly love, the Greek 'agape,' to characterize the way we are to treat all people. It is easy to treat those we already love this way, but true agape treats *all* people, friend or enemy, the same way.



As Christians, we seek the Christian life – that means living as Christ taught and lived. The concept of holiness suggests that someone becomes good as God is good. It suggests that someone can become a disciple of Christ and grow to hold the high principles that we have heard in the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount.

Actually it is easier to be inwardly holy than it is to be outwardly holy. It is easier to believe in agape love than it is to live it. I know the right things to do and I really believe in loving both neighbor and enemy. But in the moment I still stubbornly cut off the Cadillac!

John Wesley, founder of Methodism, insisted that "there is no holiness except social holiness." Holiness that lives only inside of someone is not holiness at all unless it is lived out in the way they interact with other people.



God is working in your life to make you Godly inside and out. The more you cooperate, the more you recognize that you are changing – becoming more Godly. This week we have a new challenge to think about: Jesus calls us to love people who may not love us back. Jesus calls us to treat strangers or even enemies the way we would treat our best

friend or a brother or a sister. Jesus calls us to be good as God is good – love as God loves. Jesus calls us to go the extra mile to relax and forgive the other driver.

I want to leave you with another beatific interpretation of God's blessing of happiness and joyful living:

*Blessed are those who, when given the opportunity, use their power in love, for they will find satisfaction in their lives.*

Prayer:

Pray for inward holiness that lives in all we do, say and think. Keep us mindful this week of the lessons of Jesus about loving the enemy, responding with good, not evil, and about going the extra mile to live social holiness.