

Dear United Church Congregation,

Our scripture reading this Sunday is the last part of the first chapter of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. As profound, fulfilling, and challenging the Beatitudes and other teachings are, he raises the bar even higher in our reading with a one-two punch! The first jab (I meaning instruction) was when he told people to love their enemies. The second was when he told them to "Be perfect"! As challenging as these instructions are, the church deserves credit for not overlooking them in scripture readings during worship services, prayers, and writings. The irony, of course, is that we often overlook these in our living. They seem like ideals that are impossible to achieve and only for the one who was anointed to teach and live by them.

I attended Rabbi Jack Schechter's class on Jewish texts and immigration yesterday at the Thursday Lenten program. Once again I was reminded how varied the interpretation of even one verse can be within the various translations, the commentaries, and commentaries on the commentaries in Jewish tradition (and Judeo-Christian). It's tempting to dig and dig for translations and commentaries that water down Jesus' teaching in our Sunday's text. Maybe there's an old verse in Leviticus that tells us that our enemy is really just a friend who upset us a little bit; or a distant uncle who didn't approve of what college we went to; or the competitor who always got first place to our second during our youth. Believe me, I'll be doing some digging today to see if the Greek word for "enemy" can lead me to a Hebrew word that means "rival" or a neighbor who didn't keep his or her yard up to HOA standards. But I'm pretty sure we already know the answer to that, don't we? "Enemy" is going to mean "enemy" in whatever language or context we examine. That gives you and me something to think about between today and Sunday.

One thing I'm pretty sure of is that these two impossible teachings are related to each other. That should lead us to a better understanding of why Jesus laid these commands upon us in the first place. Therefore, his left jab and right hook may really be good news and better news for all of us!

Join us for worship this Sunday at 8 and 9:30 a.m.

Scripture Reading: Matthew 5:43-48

Sermon: "Perfect Conclusion"

Classes begin at 11 a.m.

All-Church potluck lunch will be at 12:15 p.m. in Graves Hall.

Boards will meet at 1 p.m. and the Executive Council will meet at 2 p.m.

Grace and peace,

David