

What does it mean to live in the “real world?” In today’s message, Kate suggests that it is not necessarily what we might think. The message entitled “*Living in the Real World*” was based on Matthew 5:38-48.

When I first encountered the readings this week, they immediately brought me back to an incident that occurred in the college cafeteria where I was sitting having lunch with a few of my religion major friends. An acquaintance of ours must have been having a bad day. She walked by, took one look at us laughing together, and said “Oh, you religious people, all with your heads in the sky thinking everything is so beautiful! Life can be so hard sometimes! Grow up!” And she walked away leaving all of us open-mouthed and astounded.

Well, we shouldn’t have been that surprised. All through my higher education years, I ran into similar attitudes from people who thought that religion was for dreamers and faith for the impractical. My dad was not really thrilled when I took that path. He preferred I’d be an accountant working with **hard numbers**. And I especially remember a long debate I had with the chair of the Cognitive Sciences department at Northwestern University who told me he just didn’t understand seminarians like me taking his classes. “You are smart,” he said, “you should major in a science! I’ll help you get started!” I could have told him that theology used to be known as the “queen of sciences” but I didn’t think that would help. So many people told me that studying faith, theology and scripture did not deal with the **real world**. The real hardworld.

Monday I read today’s gospel, “You have heard it said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also, and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well, and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.” All of a sudden all those voices returned, “Really? Is this who you want to be in this world? A pushover? Always taken advantage of? Is this preparing you for **real**

life?”

It continues – “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 children of your Father in heaven, for God makes the sun rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.” By now the voices are screaming! “Kate, you live in a fantasy world! Love your enemies? In this world? In this national climate?” Truth be told, we lost one member of this church some years ago because, as she said to me, “I am tired of you speaking about love all the time!”

Okay, so let’s take an unscientific poll. How many of us here think that Jesus is being **completely unreasonable** by telling us to love our enemies, to turn the other cheek when slapped, and to give to everyone who begs from you? (*ask for a show of hands*) Yes, even the guy with the sign at the light on the street corner? How many of us think Jesus is naïve? That like all religion majors he had his head in the clouds, trusting everyone? You are not alone. Scripture scholars for years have found ways to speak about these directives to soften them a little bit. For instance, that they are truly a spiritual guidance of some kind, not necessarily meant for life on the street. Or that they, as with the rest of the Sermon on the Mount, are ideals to be aspired to in one’s life, not commandments to be obeyed. For, after all, isn’t it inhuman to love the one who threatens you? Who can do that?

I will tell you who. The only people who can, and find it reasonable to do that, are people who live in the real world, the world as God created it, and not as we have shaped it to be. The world of natural law from physics, chemistry, and yes, of the soul as well, though these are not observed as easily and therefore have been less developed in our secular culture. These days, most scientists speak less of “natural law” than they do of regularities and models of

phenomena that work the same way everywhere and always. They are discovered by observation and disciplined thinking. For example, Newton's third law of motion – "To every action there is always opposed and equal reaction..." It is similar to the law of Cause and Effect: "Nothing happens by chance...every action, (including thought) has a reaction of consequence." Packaged more theologically, it might say "we reap what we sow."

No, I have not become a physicist over night, but there are laws or regularities that I have observed in nature – human and otherwise. Nothing, **not one thing**, exists in this world without being connected to everything else. Called in metaphysical circles, the "law of divine oneness", it holds that what we think, say, do, and believe will have a corresponding effect on others and the universe around us that will ripple through time. In other words, it **matters** how we respond to another acting upon us, or how we act upon others. Not only in the moment, but in the great scheme of things to come. If I turn the other cheek, I may get slapped. And that slap will set other things in motion that go beyond me, physically, mentally, relationally, communally.

Think of the slaps that Mohandas Gandhi took on his Great Salt March to the sea in India. You might say that march produced nothing of great significance, but listen to Martin Luther King, Jr: *"Like most people, I had heard of Gandhi, but I had never studied him seriously. As I read I became deeply fascinated by his campaigns of nonviolent resistance. I was particularly moved by his Salt March to the Sea and his numerous fasts. The whole concept of Satyagraha (Satya is truth which equals love, and ahimsa is force; Satyagraha, therefore, means truth force or love force) was profoundly significant to me. As I delved deeper into the philosophy of Gandhi, my skepticism concerning the power of love gradually diminished, and I came to see for the first time its potency in the area of social reform."*

My dear friends, I know that there is

great fear operating in our world today. And eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth has become the rallying cry of world leaders, angry citizens, even neighbors and friends. And you know, it is **very easy** to take up that cry. It does not demand anything but anger of us. A primitive, knee-jerk response, where all can end up toothless and blind.

Instead, I ask us all to have the courage to embrace the **real world**, the world that God created, in which every being is deeply interconnected with every other. The world infused with *Satyagraha* – the force of love, the force of truth, in Christian terms, the Holy Spirit. It may not show great effect immediately, but ripples of love do not disappear, they expand and grow into great waves of healing, forgiveness, and peace.

This is not naïve, or pie in the sky thinking. To ground ourselves in love in every situation is hard, it demands all of our focus, our energy, our courage, and yes, our true humanity. It demands that we act and think like Jesus, whose life of love sent ripples to every corner of the earth. That is our calling. Amen.

