

EXPONENTIAL LOVE  
[written in oral form]

Matthew 5:38-48  
Sunday School curriculum text

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I saw this movie a while ago.

There was a villain, and it showed him doing a terrible thing, just to prove to the viewer how bad he was. There were victims and a good guy struggling to rise to defend the weaker. He did become the hero by standing up to the bad guy. There was big battle, and good guy won. Everyone was happy and celebrated.

Did you see that movie?

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That's the plot of countless popular movies and stories.

It's entertaining fiction. It's fiction!

What the hero in the story did is **redemptive violence**, and the happy ever after ending / bad guy dead / problem solved conclusion is fiction!

The good guy, not affected by the violence he committed,.. and the notion that violence ends the conflict .....are FICTION.

Moreover, the myth of redemptive violence is how the masses cope with the law of the jungle!

Survival of the fittest / the law of the jungle is a base, crude animalistic system and belief..... NO, it's worse than that.

The law of jungle for humans, is the surrender to the paradigm of the **strongest survive**, but on steroids. It's in hyper mode.

Animals are not as cruel as humans can be.

Most species will Not fight their own kind to the death.... because that would be stupid.

Those that compete, with rare exception, battle enough to prove who is the strongest / who is the alpha. Also, animals don't kill for pay, and they don't make terrifyingly destructive weapons either.

The law of the jungle is the powerful subjugating the weak.

If that concept isn't ugly enough, consider there are usually multiple people who consider themselves as the alpha.

The result is called war.

The law of jungle, imbued with the human mind, is a horrifying system.

And, redemptive violence--the fictional belief that **good** people can use evil / can play in the jungle and prevail, establishing peace and justice is ridiculous.

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Violence breeds violence. War leads to war.

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The poster child of redemptive violence is World War 2: however, victory by the Allies did not end the violence, nor solve the cause of war.

The generosity of the Marshall Plan, which made enemies into friends through restoration,.....is what ended the war!

In addition, that war did Not need to happen.

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In Oct. 1945 humans started to become civilized. We progressed, and created the United Nations.....to prevent war from happening.

Before long, the UN realized that negotiating differences between alpha leaders and their countries was not enough.

Justice for ALL humans....was needed. The law of the jungle had to be dismantled.

The vision was about respect, equality and compassion for all people.

The UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals are for that pursuit.

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We have been mostly progressing, for 72 years, YET the powerful do Not want to relinquish the old jungle ways that have been in place for thousands of years.

Evil still exists,..... Greed is blinding, and injustice and inequality are still fermenting hate and revenge.

Moreover, the age old problem of what to do with an enemy still plagues us.

The old habit of fighting back with violence or running away constantly beckons for another encore.

I think we know better,.....but.....maybe we don't really get it.

And, I fear we may be having a relapse to the old paradigm.

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There is a third way that transcends fight and flight, and transforms humans beyond the bondage of brute force.

Jesus presents this third way in Matthew 5:38-48, yet few understand how it works....or why it works so well.

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Jesus began by stating the old way--the way of responding to violence with violence, and then he replaced it with a new, non-violent reaction.

Jesus instructs that we must not react with violence, but respond to abuse and injustices in a defiant and creative manner that exposes and confronts the injustice.

Jesus gave three examples of victims boldly, creatively fighting for justice without attacking the perpetrator or using violence.

Those transforming initiatives cause a power shift and establish equality.

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Next, Jesus taught how this can happen. He stated the old way about hating enemies, and installs the new and only way to peace and justice,....which is through loving your enemy.

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This is Key. Loving your enemy changes everything.

Hate, anger and fear are powerful emotions that can cloud and cripple rational, creative thinking. Terrible crimes are committed by those consumed by anger, hate and fear, such as mass shootings.

When we are full of such intense emotions, we will not respond well to an enemy--to someone who threatens or offends us.

Healing, restoration and justice rise from a higher level of thinking than the base animalistic emotions of anger, fear and hate.

We cannot defy injustice creatively and non-violently when emotions are crashing our thoughts. Therefore, as Jesus taught, we must change that destabilizing emotion into love.....so that we can think clearly and creatively.

Mind you, loving an enemy is not easy,.....and this doesn't mean you have to be best friends and go on vacation with them, either.

Moreover, the love for the enemy is obviously not romantic love. That kind of love is high emotion and blinding, too.

The love for an enemy is brother/sisterly love; it is compassionate love and it is transcending divine love.

Again, turning the dark, negative emotions to love is not easy, but Jesus explains the best way to make that transformation.

It is:

Pray for your enemy! Pray for those who have hurt you or threaten you. Pray for those who upset you, and Pray for their well being.

That is important. Pray as you would for...."a loved one."

That's obvious!

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It is hard to coddle anger, hate and fear when we pray that good things will happen to that person.

In addition, Jesus points out that we are to put our prayers into action, too.

We must reinforce our loving prayers with loving actions, such as reaching out to those who offend us,....getting to know them,.... and doing transforming initiatives.

This sort of thing demands creativity. So, contemplate what will touch/transform the heart of the offender? Also, creatively do things that will constructively expose the injustice.

To be sure, there is no guarantee that loving prayers and actions will change an enemy / an offender. Even so, responding to violence and hate with violence and hate will surely make the situation worse, and the alpha will win with brute force .

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Consider an aggressive, threatening dog.

An enticing snack from a **confident, unafraid** person will usually dissuade an attacking dog. Still, a clearly thought out backup plan is prudent, too, such as a big net.

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This message from Jesus is a prompt to be / to live at a higher level than the animalist law of the jungle. Jesus taught us a third way/ the divine way of overcoming evil.

The empty cross symbolizes the message that love is stronger than evil. Jesus was killed on the cross by his enemies, yet through the resurrection God declared.....NO to injustices /no to brute force / No to the power of hate and fear... Love will prevail..... The way of peace, love, grace, compassion and non-violence as demonstrated by Jesus...will live on. ~~~~~~  
Into the darkest moment of hopelessness,....God resurrected Hope.

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Amazingly, the killing device of the cross has been transformed into a symbol of love--God's love. This is a sign of how radical and powerful this message is.

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January was a mostly cloudy month.....and, I'm not talking about the weather.

Increasingly, the rhetoric of hate, anger and fear are forming cumulus-nimbus storms that rage all around us..... They come from politicians , social media and our own anger and fear, and they are polarizing us and stealing our higher, divine guided level of thinking.

Hate filled characters are giving shape to this darkness...shattering the peace in a Quebec City mosque.....and elsewhere.

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We are rightly troubled by the international shift to isolationism and nationalism. Mikhail Gorbachev recently said that it looks like the world is preparing for war.

We are rightly troubled by the unjustified American ban on travelers from certain Muslim nations. There is an overt effort to label people as good guys and bad guys, and that is destructive objectification.

The myth of Redemptive Violence needs the roles of good guys and bad guys.....in order to play in the jungle, BUT it's fiction!

There are No good guys and bad guys! We are all humans under God. Some of us run and hide. Some of us choose violence. Some of us become victims and some of us become enemies/threats. But, it's ridiculous fiction to think some people are good and some are bad.....based on their geographic location, their politics, the tone of their skin,... their religion or their sexual orientation.

We cannot come together; we cannot find wholeness and peace if we buy into the polarization of good guy/bad guy.

We must remove all walls that separate and divide.

Moreover, if we notice verse 42 of today's text, we'll see that walls are pointless. When we give what we have to those in need, then what's the use of a wall? What do we have to protect if we are not hoarding?

And, keep in mind,.....all of us have walls.....

Blocking out others in public with our cell phone is a wall. Not talking and greeting people who are different from us is evidence of our wall. Expecting an organization or nation to speak for us / to do justice for us is actually a call from our side of our wall.

We need to reach out to the tax-collectors of our time. We need to show respect and compassion to those who alarm us... and to those who are different from us, especially the quiet loners. We must model divine love.....by tearing down the wall of fear and hate,.....one brick at a time. That means you and I must pray and act with love.

For example, Muslims are feeling threatened. We can counter the fear and hate with love..... one to one love.

It is noble and thoughtful for our church, as a whole, to express support, but the real restorative power is in the personal love... through prayer and actions. So write a note or tell a Muslim you care or go to a local mosque to show support.

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Most of us are feeling uneasy about what is going on.

The world seems to be shifting to a destructive manner. Events are foreshadowing the rule of jungle law.

All the while, the church is shrinking / the church is hiding.

Sadly, some are using the Christian name....as they align with their alpha dog. Those lies must be exposed, too, in creative ways.

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Now more than ever, Jesus' message of love must open our spiritual eyes.....and move us to action.

We must do the near impossible.....we must love our enemies.. and..

We must bring hope to a hopeless world.

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Fredrick Douglass, the former slave and active abolitionist in the 19th century, said, "I prayed for freedom for twenty years, but received no answer until I prayed with my feet."

It's time for action.... one to one personal action.

We believe God is love and that love is stronger than evil..... well it's time to live what we believe.

We must identify our enemies.....and Love them.

We must creatively, non-violently confront injustices and our adversaries,.....as we lift up the weak and broken.

The human world needs to be saved from the law of the jungle, and God has shown us the way.....

LOVE.

God's way is counter to the notion of *the strongest brute force wins*.

This is going against our instincts of fight or flight.

Thousands of years of human behaviour violently pushes back.  
This may be in opposition to our own DNA.  
But, don't be afraid. Do not hate. God is love. We do love!

God's Spirit will guide our feet with love. Only with God's love can we bring hope to a hopeless world.  
And, this is personal.

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May we allow God to touch our souls.....  
May God give us grace to risk something big for something good.

May we receive the gracious power of God's love and confidently cry out...."Our hearts shall sing.... the dawn draws near... the world is about turn. [lyrics from "My heart cries out"]  
AMEN.