



# SERMON RECAP

## JANUARY 18, 2026

### The Sermon on the Mount: Jesus wrestles with the Law

Matthew 5:17-48

On this weekend when we honor Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., it is good to remember that his strategy of nonviolence is rooted in the Sermon on the Mount, and this passage in particular. Here, Jesus is entering in the ancient Jewish tradition of wrestling with the Law.

In a series of statements that begin “You have heard that it was said..., but I say to you...” Jesus digs deeper into the Law. In the Beatitudes, he took common sense and turned it upside down. Here, he is taking common understanding of the Law, and digging even deeper.

New Testament scholar Amy Jill Levine calls this “building a hedge around the Law.” In other words, Jesus is putting protections up to help keep people from even coming close to violating the law. If the law is “don’t kill,” then the hedge around the law is anger. If the law is “don’t commit adultery,” then the hedge around the law is objectifying others.

Many say that Jesus is calling us to a higher standard, but I think he is really just giving us a way achieve the standard. If we say, as many preachers have said before, that he was calling us to a higher standard, then he was just creating a new set of rules. This misses the point. He was not trying to replace one set of standards with another, he was showing us the way to achieve God’s plan from the start.

The whole purpose of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) is to help people understand what the Kingdom of Heaven is. The Kingdom of Heaven is not a new set of rules. It is a way to live into God’s plan of shalom for the world. The Law was meant to help people live in right-relationship (righteousness) with God and with others. Unfortunately, the Kingdoms of the World still dominate our lives and concepts of how to live.

This section of Jesus’ sermon is helping the crowds understand that the Kingdom of Heaven is about a new way to live. There are parts that seem a little extreme, but they are meant to help us shift our way of thinking. More than this, they are meant to stir a creative and prophetic imagination that there could be another way.

One of the most important hedges that Jesus puts around the Law is the call to “turn the other cheek.” His commitment to nonviolence was a commitment to the *imago deo*. The image of God is in all people, even the ones who strike you. By turning the other cheek, we refuse to dehumanize even the one who would attack.

This is not passive weakness. This is having the courage to love even when it hurts. This is no small task. This is the higher calling that Martin Luther King recognized. On this weekend when we honor King and read the Sermon on the Mount, it is impossible to not make the connections between Christ and King’s principles of nonviolence (which are outlined below).

This weekend when we are still reeling from the murder of Renee Good at the hands of those who would not step aside, let alone turn a cheek, we must remember the courage that nonviolence takes. Nonviolence does not happen on accident. It is not something that must be chosen intentionally.

I have studied these principles for years. I have preached about the power of nonviolence. Never before have the risks seemed more real. There is a clear and present danger in Minneapolis, and something wicked this way comes. People I love and pastor are fearful. The Empire of the World is marching, masked and ready to strike. The power of love is being threatened. Our ability to turn the other cheek is being tested.

Next week there is a clergy meeting about an organized response. A march on Ash Wednesday is being planned. I’ll keep everyone informed about the details.

It is time for people of Christ to respond. I don’t know exactly what that looks like, but the Sermon on the Mount is not just a new set of rules. It is a way of life.

### SIX PRINCIPLES OF NONVIOLENCE

1. **Nonviolence is a way of life for courageous people**  
It is active nonviolent resistance to evil.
2. **Nonviolence seeks to win friendship and understanding**  
The end result of nonviolence is redemption and reconciliation.
3. **Nonviolence seeks to defeat injustice not people**  
Nonviolence recognizes that evil doers are also victims and are not evil people.
4. **Nonviolence holds that suffering can educate and transform**  
Nonviolence willingly accepts the consequences to its acts.
5. **Nonviolence chooses love instead of hate**  
Nonviolence resists violence of the spirit as well as the body. Nonviolent love is active, not passive.
6. **Nonviolence believes that the universe is on the side of justice**  
The nonviolent resister has deep faith that justice will eventually win.

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