

SERMON: October 6, 2019; SGDS

Go the Extra Mile

Greeting: Grace and peace to you from God the Father and from our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Text: Matthew 5:40-41 *But I say to you, if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; ⁴¹ and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile.*

I am guessing most of you are familiar with the old phrase; *going the extra mile*. After doing a bit of research about the origins of this well-versed saying, I was in no way surprised to learn that its first documented incidence is from Jesus' *Sermon on the Mount*. Jesus, staying true to form, used an every-day-life illustration from His era, something His fellow Jews would have understood all too well.

History reveals that it was common practice for the ruling Romans of the time to conscript, forcefully if required, any non-Roman passer-by to carry their often-heavy load, for a **Roman** mile (nearly two kilometers). In Jesus' time this was a very sore point of contention between the Judean Jews and their overlords.

Jesus' message in the *Sermon on the Mount* was counter-cultural and non-conformist on so many fronts – for both the Jews and Gentiles of that era. The saying, *going the extra mile* is only a very short line in a **world** of teaching, but it is the most-often repeated phrase coming from Jesus' sermon, possibly except for 'The Lord's Prayer'.

In order to give you an idea of how this teaching has been put into practice, here are two examples. One you may recognize, the other, maybe not.

The first example is of an Aussie bloke who is still very much alive.

Allan Sparkes, is one of Australia's most highly decorated citizens and a leader in the areas of mental wellness and suicide prevention. Allan is one of just five Australian heroes in the past 43 years to be awarded Australia's highest bravery decoration and civil award, the Cross of Valour, for saving a young boy from a flooded storm water drain in 1996. In August 2016 he was further awarded Australia's 4th highest bravery decoration, The Commendation for Brave Conduct (CBC) for saving the life of an aboriginal man who had fallen onto railway tracks at Redfern Railway Station in Sydney. In January 2017 Allan was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) for service to mental health support organisations and the community.

I believe we can safely say that Allan Sparkes is an Aussie who most definitely *went the extra mile* – and more than just once. The term ‘hero’ is a fitting description for Allan.

The next example is recorded in Matthew 27 and Luke 23 where we can read about another man who definitely *went the extra mile*. It’s one of recorded history’s most poignant examples of the Roman law of ‘conscriptio into duty’. It’s the account of how the Roman soldiers conducting Jesus’ execution march ‘encouraged’ Simon of Cyrene to carry Jesus’ cross up Golgotha Hill.

One commentator, stating the outrageously obvious, noted that the practice of conscription included *giving personal attendance, often at great inconvenience!*

No Kidding! I am pretty certain that Simon of Cyrene did **NOT** wake up on the Friday morning before Passover thinking to himself; “Hmmm yes, today I will go to Jerusalem to specifically, gladly and willingly, carry some convicted criminal’s heavy and splintery cross up a steep rocky hill!”

Of course, when we look at the service provided by *the accidental hero* Simon, we can see this remarkable Gospel message with this understanding: God – through the Holy Spirit – compelled Simon to walk on ***that road*** at ***that time*** of ***that day***.

Coincidence? – Not likely!

What about you? Have you ever – would you ever *go the extra mile* for your family, your friends, your community, or a complete stranger? Has God, through the Holy Spirit ever compelled you into service in His name? Has the Holy Spirit ever grabbed you by the scruff of the neck and shouted in your ear that the little bit of ‘good works’ (God’s work) you do is not nearly enough, that you need to *go the extra mile*?

Remember what Jesus said to His disciples – that’s you and me – when He was questioned about who we serve when we care for others?

Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least these who are members of my family, you did it to me (Matthew 25:40 NRSV).

What about the example Jesus uses immediately before the invitation to go for a longer walk? The example about giving up not only your shirt but your fleecy-lined, quilted Parka as well. It’s interesting to note that the *law of the land* when the Gospels were taught and written forbade people from demanding the outer cloak – your Parka – because it also served as a poor person’s doona, their protection against the cold of the Middle-Eastern nights. Remembering our recent run of chilly nights, would you give up your nice warm jacket for someone else who looked like they needed it more?

You do realize that there is a significant population who ‘sleep rough’ here in Horsham, don’t you? No, I am not suggesting that you should leave from here today and find a homeless person and hand over your jacket. But you could give them a warm meal, or you might just happen to have a spare blanket at home?

So; what is Jesus' message on *going the extra mile* all about? **What is He saying?**
Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least these who are members of my family, you did it to me (Matthew 25:40 NRSV).

Jesus taught the world to stop whining about our neighborhood obligations.

Instead; offer to do more than the minimum requirement, more than what is asked of you – willingly, cheerfully and without expecting anything in return.

Why?

Because we are blessed with **so much** through God's grace – blessed to share with others and not hoard for ourselves!

But always remember this; doing so is your calling from God and does not **earn** any extra brownie-points toward your salvation. God's grace and your faith in Christ is your only path to salvation and salvation gives you the freedom to be an example of how *love comes to life* by serving, without fear or favour, the people around you.

So friends; let yourself be led on that path, **go the extra mile**, to the glory of God and the good of His creation which is; everything and everybody.

Amen.