



*Better*

Matthew 5: 38-48

7th Sunday in Epiphany, February 19, 2017

First Federated Church, Peoria, Illinois

The Rev. Dr. Forrest Krummel

Text: *Be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect. (v. 48)*

Arthur Miller's 1947 play "All My Sons" is a drama based on a true story. During World War Two, between 1041 and 1943 the Wright Aeronautical Corporation based in Ohio conspired with area inspection officers to approve defective aircraft engines destined for use in the war effort. As a result of the defective engines 21 military personnel were killed.

Jesus once said that whatever is done in darkness will be brought to light and whatever is whispered will be shouted from the rooftop. The cover up was discovered by then Senator Harry S. Truman's congressional investigative board. As a result of the investigations, three Army Air Force Officers were relieved of duty and later convicted of neglect of duty.

The play is the story of two partners in the company that manufactured the defective engines, Joe Keller and Steve Deever. Joe Keller threw Steve Deever under the proverbial bus. Deever was sentenced to prison. Joe Keller kept this secret for as long as he could, but it eventually was brought out into the open. Joe's secret, now revealed, tore his family apart.

Joe's wife Kate always suspected that Joe was lying but she deadened her suspicion with alcohol. She is also mourning her son that had been missing in action for three years.

Joe's eldest son, Chris, who had just returned from serving in the war proposed to the daughter of Joe's business partner. When he discovers what his father had done, he is simply devastated. Joe defended himself saying that what he did, he did for his family. Joe says that he is no worse than others, than most men. Weary, Joe's son Chris replies, "I know you're no worse than most men but I thought you were better. I never say you as a man. I saw you as my father."

"I thought you were better." Isn't that what Jesus was telling his disciples in today's gospel lesson? You know how the world works. An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth gives you a world of blind toothless people. We see the ways of the world every day. Violence invites more violence. If someone hits you, hit them back harder. How does that work for us? Are we any more secure? We find ourselves in a never ending escalation of revenge and hate. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, "Only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."

And Jesus says, "You're better than that. My disciples are better than that." "Be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect." Perfect does not mean that you never make a mistake or stumble. The meaning of the word is influenced by Leviticus 2: 19. It means to be "whole", "mature." It means to "grow up!"

To God be the glory.