

## Be Kind to One Another

Texts: Genesis 45:3-11, 15

1 Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-50 (Series C.) Ps. 37:1-11, 39-40

Gospel Lesson: Luke 6:27-38

Prayer:

After the sermon on the Mount, Jesus continues his teaching about what the people of God do and how the people of God act. What Jesus is commanding is rightly called the hardest commandment.

It is a command that seems beyond our ability to attain. Jesus calls us to love our enemies. Consider the context of this command. Jesus has called twelve disciples to be his apostles. These twelve apostles were the divinely appointed ambassadors who would preach his gospel to the world.

After these twelve were selected, Jesus teaches what it means to follow him. Jesus pronounces four blessings. His disciples would endure *poverty*, *hunger*, *sorrow*, and *persecution*, but in their suffering, they would know his blessing. Jesus also pronounced four woes against self-satisfied people who were living for the pleasures of the moment and thought they could do without God.

There are two kinds of people, according to what Jesus taught in 6:20-26: people who suffer for his sake and have his blessing, and people who live for themselves and will come to an unhappy end. In the Beatitude, it pointed out that when we are serving the Lord, people are going to hate us, exclude us, insult us, and reject us as evil (6:22).

What are we to do about that response? The natural response would be for us to hate them and hurt them. This was the philosophy of the world at that time. I believe the world has the same philosophy today. Unfortunately, Christians have adopted much of the same attitude. But God had clearly condemned this attitude in the scriptures.

*You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD. (Leviticus 19:18;)*

On the face of the readings, the theme is pretty simple: *Do to others as you would have them do to you, do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned*, says Jesus\*, and all we have to do is love the unlovable, forgive the unforgivable. Sure, we've heard it all before. Not so easy to practice, at least in my life.

The beginning point for this week's lesson is Joseph forgiving his brothers. It is quite a dramatic story especially if you know all that happened before [Genesis 37, 39-50]. Joseph is the youngest, the favorite and best-loved of his father, the dreamer of impressive dreams, an all-around annoying little brother which caused the older brothers to successfully plot to be rid of him.

It is a compelling story, Joseph...was sold into slavery. But at the end he became the saviour of his family by accepting and forgiving them. Even though his brothers meant evil, God brought something good out of it. (*Several years ago, I met this German woman. Her story stunt me*).

On 2 October 2006, in a one-room school house deep in Pennsylvania Amish country, a local man burst in, tied up 10 girls and shot them. Five died and five survived. And their families immediately bestowed their forgiveness ..... They also said the decision by the community *to forgive* the killer and his family was not as simple as it has been seen to be.

To show their forgiveness the community attended the murderer's funeral service. The Amish believe that harboring anger and resentment is corrosive. "It will eat you up," Esh Sr. said. Forgiveness, he said, "is so ingrained in our heritage that it's part of our character".

Godly love. The word used here for love, for our enemies is (*Agapeo*) *agape* a whole-hearted, unreserved, unconditional desire for the well-being of the other. Nothing is held back.

There is no hesitation. No calculation of costs and benefits. No expectation of receiving anything in return. No pay offs. There is only total desiring of the well-being of the other for their own good.

Jesus is not promoting a dismissal of appropriate blame and its consequences. Rather, as we simply do not and will not know what transpires between God and the one who offended, we cannot, should not, must not assume the final verdict of God who knows what changes of heart and soul occur.

It's God's job, not mine, is to sort out the truly wicked evildoers and the truly righteous and faithful, and all in-between, and to judge, punish/reward accordingly. Isn't that what we want for ourselves? Earthly legal systems do what they must and should; in the Earthly realm of Christ, we are charged with loving and forgiving anyway.

Yet before we can approach attempting this difficult kind of love and forgiveness, we have to do some internal, self-directed work to believe – and accept – that God truly loves and forgives *us, you, me*. That is the hardest work of all.

In real time, when we let go of judgment, or at least begin to want to reduce and redirect it, we can find that receiving and accepting God's love helps us first, to love and forgive ourselves, and then, to love and forgive others, as we are forgiven by God.

The more we are able to love, the more we are able to forgive, and the more we forgive, the more we love and so on. It isn't meant to be a solitary practice and struggle, it is to be a part of life in a faith community, that by sharing the difficulties and rewards, we grow in the strength and courage to push on.

*The Reasoning Behind Loving Our Enemies (6:32-34)* Jesus finish this section of his sermon by explaining the reasoning behind loving our enemies and doing to others as we would have them do to us. *If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you?*

*Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full.*

If you only love people who love you, you have done nothing. Everyone loves those who love them. If you only do good to those who do good things for you, you have done nothing because everyone in the world does that.

If you lend expecting to be repaid, you have done nothing because even banks expect to be repaid. I hope we see the point. We think we are doing something great when we love those who love us, do good to those who do good to us, and lend to those who we think can repay!

Jesus says that we have done nothing because everyone does that. We are not acting like Jesus. We are acting like natural humans. We are acting like sinners, not like the holy people of God. We are not being godly. We are being worldly.

Stop thinking that you are doing anything when you love those that love you and do good for those that do good for you. This is the reason that we are to love our enemies.

If we do not love our enemies, then we are acting just like the world. Further, we are not acting in the character of God. How quickly we forget that while we were enemies, God loved us and sent his Son to die for us (Romans 5:6-11). Love your enemies.

*Jesus' Final Instruction (6:35-36) But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.*

Jesus summarizes his teaching. Love your enemies. Do good toward your enemies. Lend to your enemies and do not expect repayment. Notice the benefits of living this godly life.

*Your reward will be great.* This is what the godly life is all about. It is difficult to do good to our enemies and not to retaliate. God is going to reward us for making these sacrifices. We cannot even begin to imagine what the reward will look like when the God who created all things says we will have a great reward.

The short version for all of this is to always remember that what you and I give out in this life is what we will get back in the next. Jesus in fact gives three specific suggestions for how to *agape*, love our enemies:

1. **Do good.** Means: do well, rightly, becomingly, truly, justly, honourably.
2. **Bless.** Means: speak well of, praise, confer a favour on.
3. **Pray for.** Means: lift up to God on their behalf.

Remember the Lord's Prayer? Spend some time with it this week to read what it says, beyond the familiar syllables in recitation, especially...forgive us our trespasses /sins, As we forgive those who trespass/sin against us.

Hear what it is we are truly asking for! Think about the good that God has done for us while we were enemies and sinful, Christ died for us. We need to do good and be merciful to our enemies because of what God did for us. When the gospel is preached, some will ignore it, some will reject it, and some will accept it. Which one is your choice? **Amen.**

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