

Sermon 7th Sunday after Epiphany 23rd February 2025

Text Luke 6:27-38 ²⁷ "To you who are willing to listen, I say, love your enemies! Do good to those who hate you. ²⁸ Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who hurt you...³¹"Do to others as you would have them do to you..." ³⁶ Be merciful as your father is merciful.

Every one of you has a world view. It's how you absorb and try to make sense of all that is going on in the world around you. It's how you judge others and view others according to your values and your moral compass.

As Christians we might think we have a pretty good view of God's world view and his way of doing things, of how to be kind and considerate with others, but this reading for today really goes against our world view even as Christians.

Who of you if someone slaps you on the cheek, will say, here slap me on the other cheek as well. If someone takes your coat, how many of you will say, here, take my shirt as well? Apart from giving to your family or people you want to help out, who of you would lend money without expecting them to pay it back? What about where Jesus says, if something is taken from you, don't try and get it back. That might be ok if it's not worth much, but what if it's something precious to you or has cost you a lot of money.

When people offend us, the natural human trait is to retaliate. How good are you at controlling the emotions that well up inside you, when someone offends you.

So, what is Jesus' teaching us today. Well, he makes it pretty clear, if you are looking for a way to get even with your enemy or even how to punish someone who is offending you in a Christian way, you're not going to find it in this teaching of Jesus. Jesus says in Luke 6, ²⁷ "To you who are willing to listen, I say, love your enemies! Do good to those who hate you. ²⁸ Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who hurt you.

Also, ³¹ Do to others as you would have them do to you, and, Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Another translation is, be compassionate just as your Father is compassionate.

Which requires treating others the way you want to be treated regardless of how they are treating you. Now that is something that is hard to do particularly when the other person has really stirred up inner emotions of unkind thoughts and actions toward them.

Jesus teaches, love your enemy. Jesus teaches to pray for them. Did you note that? Pray for them, not against them. Jesus isn't going to intercede to his heavenly father if you pray, *Dear Lord, this person is really annoying me. Can you do something about them, in Jesus name. Amen.*

That is not how Jesus wants you to pray. To pray for the enemy means we ask God to be with them, to help them, to heal them. Praying for the enemy turns our thoughts from bitterness and revenge to compassion and care. Rather than seeing the other as an enemy for God to judge and punish according to our thoughts, praying for them allows God to soften our hardened hearts to be merciful as he is merciful.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a theologian who was executed by the Nazis in 1945, described this kind of prayer as a "cleansing bath" that washes away the stain of hatred.

Jesus says do good to those who hate you. Now that's a challenge, isn't it? We might think, ok, I will pray for them, but do good? You might say to Jesus, but didn't you see what they did to me? Jesus calls us to his level of love that looks out for the good of the other. So, how do we do that? Perhaps it's as simple as responding with kindness instead of retaliation. Or try to emphasize with the other in order to try and understand their reasons for what they said or did to you, without approving of they did. Empathy can help you react with kindness.

But Jesus also calls you to bless those who curse you. Jesus gives examples that totally go against how I would react. Turn the other cheek, give to someone who steals from you, treat others the way you want to be treated, even when they are not treating you that way. Lend without expecting anything in return, be merciful and forgiving.

Is that too much for Jesus to ask? The thing is, when you do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and to pray to God for your enemy, you are opening yourself up to God to use you and your possessions as his servant in the way he wants you to do good, and bless, and pray for those who hate and curse you.

If that isn't hard enough, when Jesus says be merciful as your father is merciful, he calls you and me to judge from a different world view than one that seeks judgement and revenge on our enemy. Jesus calls us to pray, Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they're doing. As we pray for them, Jesus works on our heart at the same time. To soften our hearts so that we forgive. When you forgive, you in essence say to the enemy, you are more important than the pain you caused me, and I wish to set you free and myself free from the pain you have caused me.

Does that sound impossible to do? If you think there is someone who deserves your retaliation rather than your love, be reminded of God's love for you. You and I offend God by chasing after worldly things. Sin, death and the devil are the enemies of God and when we sin, we are putting ourselves in the enemy camp and therefore through thought, word, and deed we treat God as our enemy.

Does God retaliate and get even with us? No. He sent his Son to save us. Not only did he send his Son into the world, he allowed humanity to do its very worst to his Son. Jesus was cursed, slapped, whipped, spat on, judged unfairly to the cries of crucify him, crucify him, then nail to a cross. As the crowd mocked him, he said father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.

If you ever wonder how God wants you to love your enemy, then look to the cross. See God's Son hanging there in your place; suffering for all the times we fail to show love. For all the times we acted with retaliation. That's how God treats his enemy. That is how God treats you. That's where God demonstrated his love for you, on the cross.

God's love is the answer to, why should I love my enemy? It's not because the enemy deserves it, it's because God loves you and showed you what it means to show mercy and compassion. Jesus teaches how to pray for the enemy. Jesus teaches how to do good to those who hate you, and how to bless those who cursed you. Jesus teaches forgiveness and to judge with a full measure of mercy.

Do to others as you would have them do to you. Treat them the way God has treated you. And maybe, your mercy and kindness will lead that person to repent and seek forgiveness. No longer enemies, but friends, reconciled to each other and to God.

Amen.