**February 20, 2022 Luke 6:27-38**

***Such Love***

**Scripture:** *Luke 6:27-38 NRSV*

*(27)"But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, (28)bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. (29)If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. (30)Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. (31)Do to others as you would have them do to you. (32)"If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. (33)If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. (34)If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. (35)But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. (36)Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. (37)"Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; (38)give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back."*

**Notes:**

1. How do you ***respond*** to rejection from your peers?
   * 1. *“Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets. (Luke 6:22-23 NRSV)”*
   1. A disciple’s response to ***persecution*** was to be different.
   2. Jesus presented a new ***standard***.
      1. *“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and for anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt.”*
   3. Who is able to live up to such an impossible ***standard***?
   4. ***Payback*** is still the norm.
   5. Making amends will take ***patience*** and ***compromise***.
      1. *“Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you.”*
2. Jesus says to ***forgive***.
   1. ***Loving*** your enemies is hard work, maybe even harder than ***forgiving*** our friends.
      1. “*(29)If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt.”*
   2. To love our enemies prevents us from acting out of our own ***self***-***interest***.
   3. It means that ***forgiveness*** is at the very core of our ***faith***.
3. Jesus calls us to ***break*** the ***cycle*** of violence and selfishness
   1. Someone has to ***model*** a ***behavior*** of forgiveness.
   2. People of faith use ***restraint*** and ***love*** their enemies.
      1. *“Of the twenty-two civilizations that have appeared in history, nineteen of them collapsed when they reached the moral state the United States is in now.”* Arnold Toynbee
   3. Somewhere somebody must have some ***sense***.
   4. Shine the light of ***love*** and ***forgiveness***.
      1. “*(35)But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High…*”
4. Be people who live by a higher ***standard***.
   1. Jesus is saying ***reach*** ***out*** to the poor.
   2. We as a church have ***opportunities*** to make a difference.
   3. Keep your ears and eyes open, and then take ***action***.
   4. We can turn the tide of this world towards ***Jesus***.
   5. Do not forget the ***love*** that Jesus gave to us.

**Script:**

Have you ever been excluded from an activity or event that you thought would be fun or interesting? Have you ever been left out? I can remember times in my life when I felt this way. Moments when I was craving to be included in the activities of my friends; but for some reason, unbeknownst to me, I was not invited, I was not included, I was excluded. Maybe it was because their parents would only allow them to include so many friends. Maybe it was because there was only room in the vehicle for 6 and I was the 7th. Or, maybe I was not as well liked by them as I thought I was. I could hear them whispering to each other about the plans, it seemed obvious that they did not want me to hear, even though I did; so I played along and pretended not to hear and pretended not to care; I even pretended not to be aware of their plans even though as a child I was well aware that I was being excluded.

Have you ever been there? Have you ever felt as if you were left out? What feelings came to the surface in these moments. How did you act, or should I say react to these feelings and what did you do?

In our passage this week Jesus is still on the plain, still delivering His sermon, and in the portion we read today, He is giving us a set of actions on how to respond to those who wrong us and those who do wrong in the eyes of God. Join me as we share in the reading for this Sunday from Luke 6:27-38:

***(27)"But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, (28)bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. (29)If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. (30)Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. (31)Do to others as you would have them do to you. (32)"If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. (33)If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. (34)If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. (35)But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. (36)Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. (37)"Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; (38)give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back." (Luke 6:27-38 NRSV)***

How do you respond to rejection? How do you respond to discrimination? How do you respond to condemnation from your peers or even worse yet your friends? Jesus disciples and those following after him are beginning to experience these things; and, at this particular moment in His ministry, Jesus is giving His disciples a pep talk. A few moments earlier Jesus said; ***“Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets. (Luke 6:22-23 NRSV)”***

When the disciples headed off on this journey, I wonder if they knew what to expect, would they be greeted by everybody with open arms and cheers; or would they be greeted with slurs and insulting remarks. Did they realize that this life would not be an easy one? Well, their life as disciples of Jesus, the Messiah, would not be an easy one and I am sure they were meeting with many unexpected comments. They would be despised and rejected. So, Jesus follows last week’s message of blessings and woes, with a message about “loving their enemies.” Their response to persecution was to be different than society’s norm. At the time, retribution was the common response; when someone hurt you, abused you, or did anything to you that was unjust. It was an attitude of “an eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth” that prevailed in the lives of people.

Jesus presented a new standard, a positive approach of non-violence in response to any form of hostility. ***“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and for anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt.”***

Who among us is able to live up to such an impossible standard? I know of no one, including myself. The order of our day is no different than Jesus’ day. Payback is still the norm, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But in some ways civilization seems to have taken a step backward and now the payback is always more severe than the original offense. We find ourselves in a nation where half of the population did not get the man they wanted in the Whitehouse, and they are not going to let anybody forget it until the next election. Will all of America rally behind President Biden or will we remain polarized as we were in recent times? Will Republicans and Democrats pull together to unite the nation? Or will they continue to do what’s best for themselves as a party or as individuals?

We have a real challenge ahead of us. Making amends with people of opposing views will take patience and compromise. Yet, this is precisely what Jesus wanted his followers to do. In fact, he even took it a step further. ***“Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you.”*** Wait that is the Golden rule I was taught in first grade, that is the command I was taught in Sunday school; But that is how simple getting our world and our country back on track.

If we have been watching any of the Olympic coverage, we cannot help but here of the young figure skater from Russia who has failed a drug test and yet has been allowed to participate in the skating events. I do not know why she is even allowed to participate if she had a positive drug test, rules are rules, and the punishment is spelled out clearly; many good athletes in the past have been excluded from participation, but I know that this decision to allow her to skate has put a damper on the positive events that have been taking place, and the thrill of victory for those who have participated according to the rules and standards. What should we do about this fifteen year old girl? Many say that she should not have been allowed to skate, many say she should not be allowed to participate in the events, many say that she should be stripped of any medals that she has received in these games. Jesus says to forgive her, Jesus says to forgive her, not only allow her to participate but also allow her to collect the gold medals that she qualified for.

Forgiving our friends who have different points of view is one thing, but loving our enemies is a much more daunting task. Forgiving is hard work, let there be no doubt about it. Nevertheless, make no mistake, loving your enemies is hard work also, maybe even harder than forgiving our friends. Jesus is advocating a behavior that is totally opposite from revenge. “***(29)If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt.”***  If we acted like Jesus taught, we would most likely be seen as foolish, criticized for our leniency, maybe even thought to be crazy.

To love our enemies prevents us from acting out of our own self-interest. It means that to do harm to others in any way is totally out of the question. It means that we live by a higher standard, one that leads us to a new and different world which transcends the one in which we live. It means that forgiveness is at the very core of our faith.

To follow this principle is humanly impossible. On the other hand, look what happens in the Mideast when a terrorist blows himself up in a market place. The government responds by launching a few missiles in a suspected neighborhood which sympathizes with the terrorist group. Or perhaps it begins in reverse. Unfortunately, there is a never-ending tragic cycle of violence that does nothing but escalates and causes further bloodshed and even more heinous acts of violence. The same kind of reciprocal violence happens all over the world. Rather than see it as revenge we see it as a “war on terrorism.” But let there be no mistake, this is revenge, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

Jesus calls us to break the cycle of violence and selfishness by taking a road that does not seek revenge. Someone has to take the first step, someone has to model a behavior that sets the stage for peace, harmony, and yes even forgiveness. That my friends is us. Genuine people of faith use restraint and genuine people of faith love their enemies.

But we are not competing in the Olympics, we aren’t fighting terrorists either. We are not putting on a pair of skates and hitting the ice, we are not driving Humvees through the streets of a war-torn city. We are just ordinary citizens trying to make a living. Surely Jesus is not talking about us when he says to “love our enemies.” How can we bring this closer to home?

I read a story that Dr. Martin Luther King shared in a sermon many years ago *(A Knock at Midnight – Martin Luther King)*. He and his brother were driving one evening from Atlanta to Chattanooga. His brother was driving the car. And for some reason the drivers were very rude that night, by not dimming their lights; few drivers that passed them dimmed their lights. Dr. King’s brother looked over and in an angry tone said: “I know what I’m going to do. The next car that comes along here and refuses to dim the lights, I’m going to fail to dim mine and pour them on in all of their power.” Dr. King looked at him and said: “Oh no, don’t do that. There’d be too much light on this highway, and it will end up in mutual destruction for all. Somebody got to have some sense on this highway.”

Somebody must have sense enough to dim the lights, and that is the trouble, isn’t it? As all the civilizations of the world move forward on the highway of history, having looked at other civilizations that refused to dim the lights, so many people have decided to refuse to dim theirs as well. And English historian, Arnold Toynbee stated in the late 60’s ***“Of the twenty-two civilizations that have appeared in history, nineteen of them collapsed when they reached the moral state the United States is in now.”*** It is because civilizations have failed to have sense enough to dim the lights.

Somewhere somebody must have some sense. Men must see that force brings force, hate creates hate, toughness produces toughness. And it is all a descending spiral, ultimately ending in destruction for everybody. Somebody must have sense enough to turn away from the hate and evil of this world; sense enough to shine the light of love and forgiveness within this world.

Jesus said it and I stand by what he said, “***(35)But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High…***” To be children of the most high is to be people who live by a higher standard. They are people who ascribe to a non-violent life style. They are people who are willing to turn the other cheek. They are people who break the cycle of violence by dimming their lights.

Who is there in your life that you need to forgive? Who is there in your life that has been excluded? Who is there in your community that could use a hand up, a little relief from the struggle they are living in? And what is Jesus telling you to do about it? Jesus is saying reach out to the poor, the lonely, the broken hearted and the weak; help them to get back on their feet. Embrace them as a friend and include them in your world. Welcome them into your life and help them improve theirs.

Today we as a church have opportunities as we strive to make a difference in our community, as we strive to help the less fortunate in our world. But we as a church must not wait for them to come to us. Many times, when we are at our kindness outreaches, we tell the people we encounter that if they ever need anything to give us a call. But rarely do they call. We must keep our ears and eyes open to what’s going on in the community, and then take action. If you have an idea let somebody on the board know, let me know and together maybe we can turn the tide of this world towards Jesus. Let us not forget the love that Jesus gave to us when we were lowly outcasts lost in sin, that is the kind of love that we should have for our fellow man. Today we are going to close in the singing page 88 in the Hymnal Such Love.