

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church

Shobonier, Illinois

Epiphany 7C

February 23, 2025

Luke 6:27-38

Love Your Enemies

[Jesus said:] "But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. . . . 31 And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them. . . . 36 Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful." (Luke 6:27-28, 31, 36 ESV).

Dear friends in Christ, the only Savior of the world.

In last week's Gospel reading we heard Jesus pronounce blessings and woes. In that, He was declaring that the kingdom of God that He ushers in upsets the kingdom of this world. The upshot is that Jesus overcomes the world, and thus, turns things on their head. Still, it's not easy to hear. For we would most certainly rather be rich than poor, full rather than hungry, laugh rather than mourn or weep, and have people speak well of us rather than have them exclude us, revile us, and spurn our name as evil because we follow Jesus.

Today, we hear Jesus tell us twice, "Love your enemies." That's hard to hear! Besides, it too goes against the ways of the world. To be sure, we do have enemies – those who hate us, curse us, mistreat us, strike us, and take our belongings. It's personal.

Yet, Jesus tells us that we are to love our enemies. And as their hatred and mistreatment increase so should our love for them. And as difficult as that sounds, Jesus doesn't leave us wondering what it means. He provides some concrete examples of what it means to love our enemies.

First of all, we are to do good to those who hate us. Now that's certainly a tough one. How do we know who hates us? Usually by what they say and do to us. Their hatred manifests itself in their actions. But our response is to be one of love. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, we see an example of such love in action. Proverbs 25 tells us, "If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the LORD will reward you." (Prov. 25:21-22). We are to "help and befriend him in every bodily need." And, when St. Paul wrote to the Romans, he quoted those verses from Proverbs and adds, "Overcome evil with good." And while this is difficult to do, it becomes even more so as our enemies' actions against us escalate.

We are then told to "bless those who curse you." As our enemies' hatred progresses to verbal attacks, we are to bless them, that is, we are to do whatever we can that is for their good. We are to keep their best interests at heart, especially their spiritual welfare. We are to call down God's blessings on them. That also means that we do not "deceitfully belie, betray, slander, nor defame our neighbor, but defend him, speak well of him, and put the best construction on everything." Not only do we not respond negatively, but we act positively to bring blessings to our enemy.

We are also to pray for them. We are to ask God to forgive them their sins. And we find two examples of this very thing in the New Testament. The first and greatest, of course, is Jesus Himself. As He hung on the cross He prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." Instead of calling down fire and brimstone on His enemies, He prayed for their forgiveness. More than that, Jesus died for them. The second example is Stephen. As he was being put to death, He too prayed that God would forgive his enemies.

Furthermore, we should suffer wrong rather than do wrong. Again, Jesus is our example. In fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, Jesus was "oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth." (Is. 53:7). And if someone injures you or takes what is yours, you're not to retaliate, but are to be willing to give even more. After all, vengeance belongs to God. That's not to say we shouldn't defend ourselves and others. But love – for others and for our enemy – is to be the guiding principle.

And while all this sounds difficult, if not impossible, we need to see that Jesus practiced what He preached. We've already seen a few examples. But even more God the Father demonstrated that love too. While we were yet sinners, that is, enemies of God, He loved us such that He sent His only Son to suffer and die for our sins. He promises life and salvation to all that believe their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake. John writes, "This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love; not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:9-10).

And this points out something about the love Jesus is talking about. It doesn't show itself in kindness to those that love us and are kind to us. Even "unrepentant sinners do that." Rather it involves showing love to those who do not deserve our love, those that hate us and treat us in the most unkind manner. That love is a striving after our enemies' welfare even though they continue to harm us. That love acts in a merciful way. And it acts that way no matter what our enemy does.

Another way of summarizing Jesus' command is the Golden Rule, "Do to others as you would have them do to you." That means that no matter how poorly others treat us, we continue to do good to them. We continue to show them how we wish to be treated by the way we treat them. Even if they don't respond in the way we would like, we still treat them as we would like to be treated.

But we certainly can't do this on our own. It's so unnatural. Yet, it's only because God has loved us with such a great love and made us His children in Baptism that we can hope to keep Christ's command. And as we grow in our faith through the study God's Word and hearing it proclaimed and as we partake of the Lord's Supper, we grow in our ability to do as He says. As we receive Christ's body and blood, we receive power to love others. Every time we hear that our sins are forgiven our faith is strengthened and we are further empowered to live as God's children and to love our enemies.

And this is important because we do often fail to love others, including our family and friends. But because Jesus died and rose again, we are assured of God's forgiveness for the times we do fail. When we truly repent of our sins and confess them to God, we are sure that He hears us and that He forgives us.

And as we live in the power of that forgiveness we can show love to our enemies. And as we behave in the way God demands and demonstrate love, we will be blessed. We will receive a great reward. And the greatest reward we receive is eternal life in heaven. But, you see, we get that reward purely from God's goodness and mercy. We in no wise deserve it. When we treat our enemies well, we don't deserve God's gracious blessings. We are merely demonstrating that we are indeed His children. Our lives show forth what we believe in our hearts. The very love which God has showered on us will flow forth from us as evidence of our faith. If we are truly God's children and truly believe in Christ as our Savior, our lives will show forth the fruits of repentance.

And as we love our enemies, we won't judge them. That is, we won't curse or condemn them. Rather, we will forgive them. And the extent to which we forgive them is demonstrated by Jesus' example of the grain measurer. Instead of just pouring it into the container and giving it to you, He pours it in, presses it down, shakes it to get as much as possible in and then fills it to overflowing. Then He gives it to you. He pours it into the fold of your robe so that you can take it with you. God is so generous that His forgiveness overflows our ability to hold it all. So, we too as God's children are to forgive others.

But if we withhold forgiveness from others, God will withhold forgiveness from us. That's what we pray in the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." The measure we use in dispensing forgiveness will be the same measure God's uses for us. If we truly are God's children and have really received His great blessings and forgiveness, then we will pass those along to others. After all, we don't deserve God's love either. But He gives it to us anyway.

Today's Old Testament reading provides an example that draws all this together. Joseph's brothers had sold him into slavery. His enemies were in his own family. Then, when he was in Egypt working for Potiphar, he was unjustly accused of trying to seduce his boss's wife. He was thrown into prison. While he was there, the king's cupbearer promised to tell Pharaoh about Joseph. But Joseph had to wait for two more years. Once he was released, we find no mention that he sought revenge against either Potiphar's wife nor against the cupbearer. Then, after thirteen years of being separated from his family, he is reunited with them. And when he sees his brothers, the very ones who treated him so poorly, he is filled with love and compassion. He certainly had a great chance to get even with them. In fact, he had a chance to get even with

everyone. He could have tossed them in prison or even had them killed. But he realized the wonderful things the Lord had done in his life and recognized God's hand at work through it all. So he forgave his brothers and welcomed them with open arms and provided for them.

God loves us despite all our sins against Him. Jesus loved His enemies and prayed for them even while hanging on the cross. Joseph, a mere mortal, loved his brothers who treated him as an enemy and forgave them. So, in the power of God's love for you, love your enemies. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.