

Sermon February 20, 2022

A nice moral lesson or the gospel?

Gospel reading: Luke 6:27–38

[Jesus said:] “But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them. “If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. Judging Others “Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.”

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Jesus begins this same account in Matthew THIS way: You have heard it said: “Love your neighbor and hate your enemies.”... That part is missing here in Luke. In Luke it picks up right after the “woes” of last week's lesson... *Woe to you when all men speak well of you, because that is the way that your forefathers spoke of the FALSE prophets...*

[Jesus says...] But I say to all of you who are able to hear me, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.

Lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High.

The lesson is about loving even your enemy... maybe even *most especially* your enemies. Which is weird, don't you think?

He even gives us an excursus on the subject that is almost a third of the total lesson...

“If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount.

It's clear that loving the ones who are easy to love is of no DIVINE benefit or credit to your account. As if God doesn't take any special notice of this... of YOU for doing this... Saying, “So what?” “Big Deal” It's not very special, since even the pagans do that. But if you want credit for DOING something, a benefit for BEING someone: Love your enemy.

WHY? Because... Even GOD DOES THAT.

“I tell you, love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for He IS kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful, JUST as your Father IS merciful.”

It is perhaps another way of saying... DO THIS FOR ME, BECAUSE I DO THIS FOR YOU.”

And if you give that even a moment's thought, you might suddenly realize that when God says “Because this is the way I treat YOU,” He is saying that YOU are HIS enemy. Or... at least you WERE, even if you are not His enemy anymore.

Remember what we said as we stood before this altar and began our worship this morning. We declared that we are poor miserable sinners, confessing our sins and iniquities with which we have ever offended Him. We have sinned against Him in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved Him with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We justly deserve His present and eternal punishment.

What were we saying then, if we were NOT saying that we are His enemies? And we do not deserve His mercy.

Yet what do we say? “For the sake of Your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in Your will and walk in Your ways to the glory of Your holy name.”

Notice that in our confession we ask that we might be LIKE HIM ALSO... and WALK IN HIS WAYS.... That is, ACT like him.

No wonder that Jesus immediately moves on to the topic of JUDGING people.

“Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure, you use it will be measured back to you.”

I love that description... It's the opposite of a bag of potato chips. You know when you buy a bag of potato chips that it's about half filled with air. (That's supposedly to protect the contents from breaking but it feels like a cheat...) Or the “foot-long” sub sandwich that is in reality only 11 inches long. Or the famous coffee in the grande size, the 20 oz. cup that's filled with 18 oz. of over-brewed coffee.

What Jesus is saying is that there are no such cheats in his generosity... That bag of rice is filled, shaken, tamped down and then topped off over the rim, filled with all that it can hold and even more some. That's what God's economy looks like. Generous. No corners cut, not stingy.

During our pastors' Bible study this week, I made my standard objection to what “Judge NOT” means and doesn't mean. Because I think it gets thrown up in our faces quite a bit these days, with the standard line being... “YOU CAN'T judge me!” Which I like to answer with... “I can't judge your heart or your motives, But I can most certainly judge your behavior.”

Now you might think that I would get upset when I have made a solid declaration like that and one of my friends challenges it... But I don't, actually. I appreciate it. I think we should be able to defend our positions, and if we can't, then to be open to the discussion of other points of view.

Brett said, “I hear that. But I want you to tell me where the bible actually SAYS that.”

“Good point,” I answer, “we should base our doctrine in the scriptures. How about Col 1:28

He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ.”

Or from Paul's letter to the Thessalonians, –

“We urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone.”

Or

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.”

“Well, that’s just the point,” said Pastor Engel. “I would define judgment as: good or bad; or holy or unholy; or saved and not saved. I think the word that you are looking for is *warning*.’ WE don’t judge anyone, that is God’s business.”

“Fair enough,” I answered, “But, If I’m in a car with someone who is not paying attention to their driving, and I warn them that if they don’t make the turn at the end of the road, they will drive off the cliff. I am making a judgment on the quality of their driving. I am saying to a degree that in my humble opinion, they are not driving WELL at the moment.”

I suppose it makes a difference whether or not my opinion is an accurate reflection of God’s reality.

I suppose that’s why St. Paul writes to the Corinthians... and this is my paraphrase... Not to rush to judgment; Be patient and bearing with one another. To be long suffering just as the Lord is long suffering, bearing with us. And in this also to receive praise from God.

Which ties us right back into the text.

The temptation in preaching this text is to hammer it home so that you will behave in like manner. The lesson being that God wants you to do this and in doing this you earn His favor... His benefits and credits. That’s a nice moral lesson for us. But it wouldn’t be the gospel.

And I hope you know why that would not be “good news.” Even if it is a good work. And even if we ought to be imitators of Jesus Christ. If we do these things, it’s not out of a selfish desire to earn credits or a nice place in the kingdom of heaven... Those are nice things, don’t get me wrong.

It’s a very nice thing to earn God’s favor. In fact, it is a blessed thing. And likewise, it is a very nice thing to receive credit from God, for being faithful to His mission. In fact, that too is a blessed reward. But it still has nothing at all to do with WHY we would behave in such a manner.

We do them out of gratitude... it is a response to God's love for us. We LOVE... because God first loved US. THIS is the way God acts toward us.

As St. Paul writes to the church at Rome (in fact we should read much more in this letter but we will settle for these few verses from chapter 5):

"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, while we were God's **enemies**, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.