

Discipleship in the Lectionary – 02/20/2022



A look at the week's lectionary through the lens of discipleship and disciple-making.

Seventh Sunday After the Epiphany

Revised Common Lectionary Year C

Sunday, February 20th

Luke 6:27-38

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Conquering hatred

If there is one word that characterizes much of the socio-political discourse today, that word would be *hatred*. Nowhere in our society is immune, even the church. We instinctively know hatred is wrong. History is full of examples of what happens when this level of hatred exists between people groups that occupy the same landmass. It is not a pretty picture. Many are desperately seeking an answer to this problem. One attempted solution to this problem is to outlaw hatred by introducing the idea of hate crimes. The next progression is to outlaw disagreement altogether and create the expectation that one has the right not to be offended or be faced with any opinion that is contrary to their own. A terrorist is now considered someone who disagrees with you.

This week we have the second part of Luke's Sermon on the Plain teaching block (6:27-38). The final part of this sermon (6:39-49) does not appear in the lectionary and will be addressed in Matthew's parallel next year. Today's text is packed with revolutionary teaching including familiar passages such as loving your enemies and not judging others. Here Jesus is asking us to do the opposite of default human behavior; yet when we look at the practical consequences of these behaviors through the lens of what is happening in our world today, these behaviors expected of Jesus' disciples can send ripples across our relationships and social circles, transforming our world in the process.

Luke 6:27-38 Commentary

²⁷ "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.

Typically, when Jesus says "hear," He means for us to not just hear but to "do" (Luke 6:46,47, 11:28; John 14:21)! "*Love your enemies*" occurs twice in the text (6:27 and 6:35) and thus what happens between these two bookends should be considered as a unit. While this is a well-known phrase, many people have difficulty with it. First, many people often respond by claiming they have no enemies. In our society, an enemy is often thought of as something at a national level rather than at a personal level. Second, how do I love an enemy? We can perhaps better understand the phrase "*love your enemies*" by looking at the original Greek words.

In English, we ask a lot of the word "love." What we mean by the word "love" depends very heavily on the context. For instance, "I love you" has very different connotations depending on whether you are addressing your best friend, your mother, your spouse, or your dog! The ancient Greeks had several different words for "love" that give us a more precise meaning. The word used for "love" in this text is *agape*. This is self-less love, unconditional

love. A love that seeks to do the best thing for all people in all circumstances. *Agape* was translated into Latin as *caritas* which is the origin of our word charity. The word rendered as "enemy" is "*echthrous*" which can mean "hated" or "adversary". Thinking of "*love your enemies*" as "be charitable to those who hate you" has much more of a daily application for most people.

If we consider "*love your enemies*" in this way, why include the next command which appears to be identical? If we similarly unpack "*do good to those who hate you*" we find the word rendered as "hate" is from the root "*miseo*" which can also be translated as "love less" or "put second." A good example of this is seen in the following Scriptures:

As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." (Romans 9:13)

"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:26)

Perhaps we might apply "*do good to those who hate you*" in our lives as "act rightly to those who put their own interests first." Most of us have plenty of opportunity to do that!

The text continues with two more commands to act in an opposite way to default human behavior. Bless those who curse you and pray for those who abuse you. Like the two other previous commands, these actions of blessing and praying for those who do not treat us in the way we would hope they would have a profound effect on us. Over time, we cannot hate someone we bless and pray for. Therefore, our heart and attitude to such people change. As our attitude changes so does our behavior. As our behavior changes, those who "hate" us may also experience a change in attitude to us. Often the first step in changing the world around us is to first change our self.

²⁹ *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.*

The operative word here is "cheek." Slapping someone on the cheek is more of an insult than an assault. The parallel text in Matthew gives us more supporting detail:

But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. (Matthew 5:29)

How do you slap someone on the right cheek? Assuming being right-handed was the norm in those days, the only way to slap another person on the right cheek with your right hand is by using the back of the hand. In other words, Jesus is referring to a back-handed slap. Such would be an insult, not an assault. Here Jesus is teaching us to avoid retaliation and escalation when someone insults us, even for no reason. The key point here is responding with a loving attitude.

Similarly, if someone takes your jacket, offer them your shirt rather than retaliate. We should respond to abuse, being taken advantage, rejection, and the like by being generous and compassionate.

³⁰ *Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back.* ³¹ *And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.*

These next verses continue to illustrate how Jesus' disciples are held to a higher standard than the world. We are to be generous to a fault to those who are truly in need, i.e., those who are forced to beg. This does not mean being foolish (Matthew 7:6) or giving to those who are not truly in need (2 Thessalonians 3:10) or where our

giving may cause harm - such as enabling a bad situation to continue. We are called to do more than just throw money at someone without understanding the circumstances.

Doing to others as you would wish they would do to you is frequently called the Golden Rule. The next verses illustrate how the Golden Rule is not just to be applied to friends but to adversaries also.

³² "If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³ And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴ 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. ³⁵ 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. ³⁶ Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.

These verses illustrate that simple reciprocity of the Golden Rule is insufficient. This section links back to the commands given in 6:27 - "love your enemies" and "do good to those who hate you." "You will be sons of the Most High" is interpreted to mean demonstrating that you are sons by imitating God's love and mercy to those who are ungrateful and evil. God bestows common grace upon all.

³⁷ "Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; ³⁸ 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."

This next section focuses on judging others. It contains two negative and two positive commands. Judge not/condemn not applies to the behavior of Jesus' own disciples and not the appropriate use of legal discipline. In other words, this is about the human tendency to find fault and criticize others. Forgiving others goes beyond simply stopping criticizing, it involves continuously promoting the well-being of others. The analogy of measuring grain is used to illustrate what we give we will receive. If we give a generous measure then we, in turn, will receive a generous measure and *vice versa*.

Reflections

Jesus' teachings here are revolutionary and seem to go against our natural default behaviors. These teachings certainly go against worldly values. Yet we must remember that we live in a fallen world, and we are fallen creatures. When considered against who we were created to be before the Fall, these teachings would be quite natural. Even today we know deep down that we do not want to hate. Jesus teaches us how we can still make this a reality in the fallen world. In fact, the only way to conquer hatred is to follow these teachings. Of course, these teachings are hard to follow. We can only live these behaviors if we have a commitment to self-discipline and practice along with a reliance on the power of the Holy Spirit. In worldly terms, there is much risk in living a life this way but for one who is filled with the Spirit there is nothing to lose, nothing to be ashamed of. Loss is gain. Our life is about what we can give rather than what we can get... *For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.*

The best solution to hatred is Jesus, not some legislation. After all, it was Jesus who counted a Zealot and a Tax Collector among His close followers. Without Jesus, the Zealot would have assassinated the Tax Collector given half the chance yet these two lived in community with one another.