

“But love your enemies, do good,  
and lend expecting nothing in return.” AMEN!

You know what I hate about Jesus!?!

His sermons.

“Love your enemies, do good to  
those who hate you,  
bless those who curse you,  
pray for those who abuse you.”

As if last week’s lesson on the blessings and  
the woes wasn’t hard enough to hear,

today, we hear the second part of  
Jesus’ sermon on the level place.

And it’s no wonder he transitions to this part  
with the words,

“But I say to you that listen.”

Jesus knew people were checking out,  
falling away, deciding not to follow him  
because his teaching was just  
too tough to hear, even too impossible  
to follow.

“Hey, if you’re still listening,” Jesus said,  
“I’ve got some more teaching for you.” (Pause)

The sermon reminds me of a  
seminary professor’s recommendation  
to us students as we read about Jesus  
in the gospels.

The professor said,  
“Always keep this question in mind,  
‘Why did they kill him?’”

We get an answer here in chapter 6 of Luke.

Jesus’ sermon words sound lovely  
until we have to do it.

“Love your enemies?”

It is perhaps the most difficult thing to do.

“Do good to those who hate you,”

Come, again?!?!

When I am honest, I admit that I’d be  
much happier (satisfied)  
to drop my enemy off a cliff than

I would be to love them,  
let alone be good to them.

Yet, that notion of giving up the right to retaliate  
is the only way to keep violence  
from creating more violence.

We cannot ignore how very dangerous it would be  
if everyone began to love their enemies.

It could mean more money would be available  
to pay build affordable housing and  
equal education.

It would mean spending fewer dollars  
on prison construction and mass incarceration.

Much power resides in leaders that  
encourage people to hate one another.

Weapons manufacturers receive  
gigantic contracts from governments  
to have the latest military hardware  
to kill on a video screen.

Jesus knew the ways people in power used fear  
and hate to stay in power.

This sermon was one of the reasons Jesus was killed.  
(Pause)

Have you ever been so mad at someone  
that you wished them dead?

Don't worry, I won't ask for a show of hands. :-)

But most of us have been picked on enough,  
bullied a time or two, disrespected...

And witnessed a person in power doing  
something destructive or abusive and  
have wished for that person to be dead.

Remember that paragraph last week that  
I noted was so important to not miss?

The paragraph that comes before the blessings  
and the woes where we were told that  
a great crowd of disciples and

a great multitude of people were  
there to be healed, cured and  
listen to Jesus teach.

Remember that?

Then think about our divides today and

consider the way 47% or so of our society  
that views politics, and Christianity,  
as a no compromise game and  
a faith that is being  
discriminated against.

Consider the ways a percentage of our  
Christian churches take the verse out of context  
at the end of of our gospel and

use it to coerce people to give more money  
to the church with the guarantee that you'll  
get what you give back in full measure.

But you know what?

If you give more money to the church,  
the only guarantee is that you're gonna  
have fewer dollars in your pocket.

You'll be contributing to the work of the church and  
be a critical part of supporting a way of life  
that is bigger than what we can do alone.

You'd be learning a valuable lesson about  
giving back to God a part of all that's entrusted  
to you.

That's all true!

But, to think that Jesus' difficult sermon  
message suddenly gives us a secret  
"golden gospel prosperity key" at  
the end is pretty ludicrous.

There's nothing secret,  
nor is there anything easy,  
about being a Jesus follower.

It might even make people want to kill you. (Pause)

Yet, the grounding message from Jesus  
today is about delight,  
not hating what he has to say.

If we can find a way to delight in his words  
then we may find a way to hear his imperative  
to love enemies,

to give the shirt off our own backs,  
to offer the other cheek when struck.

It's not permission to let people abuse you.  
It's a call to be within a community  
that says together, we can do what  
Jesus commands as a body of Christ.

We can learn to forgive, we can learn to take

care not to judge others, and even learn  
to love our enemies.

It might be too hard to do it on our own,  
to be non-violent and love enemies,  
but as a church community we can agree  
that it's "life important" to try. (Pause)

The story of Joseph and his brothers in Genesis  
reveal an important facet of Christianity:

Forgiveness.

Joseph forgives his brothers and tells them  
that even though they meant to  
be deceptive in their behavior.

Treacherous in their actions.

That God brought their bad behavior to be  
a function of God's will.

If you recall the whole story,  
you'll remember that Joseph's brothers  
were jealous of him.

He got the famous coat from dad;  
he was given all the attention and  
the easiest chores because he was

the youngest.

Then on top of all that  
Joseph began to tell his brothers  
about his dreams.

The brothers interpreted those dreams to mean  
that Joseph would one day rule over them.

How dare he share such a dream!

Little brother ruling over bigger brother!

It was the final straw and the older brothers  
were ready to extinguish the little runt.

Thankfully, a voice of reason came from one of them,

Reuben said, "Shed no blood,  
let's throw him in a pit."

Not exactly the best savior or advocate  
but Reuben's plan was to come back and  
take Joseph home to safety.

No sooner they'd decided to follow  
Reuben's plan when in the distance they saw  
a caravan of Ishmaelites coming toward  
them and the brothers devised



a new plan.

Sell him!

We'll make a few bucks *and* be rid of him.

It was a win-win, right?

Well, not so much for Joseph,  
but at least he was alive.

Joseph was taken to Egypt and the brothers  
went home to tell their father, Jacob,  
that Joseph must have been killed  
by a wild animal.

It was a lie they'd have to keep for a long time.

A shame they had to live with seeing  
how their father grieved.

Time passed, as it tends to do, and  
Joseph became an important leader in Egypt.

A famine came to the land of Israel and  
the brothers went to Egypt to find food and  
ask for help.

When they get to Egypt they come face to face

with Joseph but do not recognize him.

We, the readers, are ready for a good dose  
of retaliation and the stage is set when  
Joseph plants a valuable silver cup  
in Benjamin's sack so that it looked  
like he'd stolen it.

Oh, it gets juicy as we think of the way  
the brothers squirm with worry and have  
to return home to home with the bad news,  
but they are getting what they  
deserve.

We expect retaliation from  
the former victim Joseph, and sweet justice  
to play out for the one who had  
been wronged.

Joseph revealed himself to his brothers and  
they expected to get the violence  
due to them, too.

The Bible told us they were silent, terrified,  
because their evil plan done long ago was  
coming around to them and  
they knew they were guilty.

But Joseph does something quite unanticipated.

He responded to their fear by revealing  
a surprising new perspective.

Instead of focusing on the harm done to him  
and getting retribution for the evil intent of  
the brothers against him,

he focused instead on asserting God's role  
in the things they had done.

Maybe, just maybe, what the brothers  
had unknowingly and uncaringly done  
was a part of the plan God had to save  
many lives.

The cycle of retaliation was broken  
when Joseph saw God at work even in  
the evil things his siblings did to him. (Pause)

While the story puts a surprise ending  
for us to think about,

we might also be recognizing that there are  
both benefits and dangers in this kind of theology.

The benefit is what I have already mentioned.

The cycle of retaliation was broken.

Yet, we may be sensing that there is  
danger in this kind of theology, too.

The consequence of believing God to make  
positive the evil actions of people is problematic.

It allows for some to justify the slaughter  
and slavery of millions of Black people  
as being “part of God’s plan to save them  
with a life in America.

It allows for the institutional church  
to place immoral and unethical people in office.

It is a dangerous road to interpret Joseph’s  
“God-talk” to mean the greater good justifies  
the evil actions and hurtful intentions  
that people do to other people.

This story from Genesis is to be viewed not in  
the larger context of God making our  
poor behaviors good but instead as  
a paradigm of forgiveness.

Few people would be as forgiving as Joseph  
was to his brothers.

Few have the capability to love that much,

but God does. (Pause)

I know, it is hard to keep listening to Jesus.

He makes us kick and squirm and try to reinterpret  
his words to mean something else and get us off  
the hook.

We want a nice, safe, easy religion that  
doesn't include loving enemies.

But it is messy to take on the ethic of imitating Jesus.  
Love has a way of making life sloppy.

We will make enemies when we take  
his Sermon on the Plain seriously  
because it doesn't allow us to stay silent.

It moves us into action and keeps us  
from going about in life making nice. (Pause)

There is a key verse in the midst of  
this difficult teaching, however.

And this is where I will close.

Just about in the center of our gospel today,  
we read,

“Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”

We delight in that news! Thank God for it!

God is merciful to all human beings and  
because of that,  
we might be merciful, too.

AMEN!