

**“Easier Said Than Done”
Luke 6:27-38
Sermon by Rev. Paul Hibbard
7th Sunday after Epiphany
Woodbury UMC
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“You just need to be strong.”

“You just have to move on.”

“You just have to let go and let God.”

“You just need to understand that she’s in a better place.”

These are all things I have heard well-meaning family and friends say to someone who has just lost their spouse or significant other. Someone that they have spent years if not decades with and for whom this loss is incredibly difficult.

Just recently I had someone who had experienced such a loss and who had heard some of the “you just” I just listed, tell me that while he understood the intent of others, that their advice to “just be strong” and that he “just had to move on” was **EASIER SAID THE DONE.**

While this may be an extreme example, I find that many times I have received advice or instruction that started with the words “You just” it is often easier said than done.

I imagine you can think of a few instances where you have uttered those words, “Easier said than done” or their close cousin “Easy for you to say.”

I’m not sure if it was easy for him to say, but that opening list of instructions by Jesus in today’s Scripture lesson had me thinking, “All well and good Jesus, but easier said than done.”

Let’s take a look at that list again:

- Love your enemies!
- Do good to those who hate you.
- Bless those who curse you.
- Pray for those who hurt you.
- If someone slaps you on the cheek, offer the other cheek also.
- If someone demands your coat, offer your shirt also.
- Give to anyone who asks; and when things are taken away from you don’t try to get them back.
- Do to others as you would like them to do to you.

Looking at some of the actions called for here they all seem pretty doable: LOVE, DO GOOD, BLESS, PRAY, GIVE

I think most of us can and do these things every day.

They are things that many of us have been taught to do by our families and by our churches. But I think sometimes that teaching has not always given a full ear to what Jesus is saying here. The instruction is not just to love, and we can choose who is most deserving of our love, but to love our enemies.

William Barclay, in his commentary on the gospel of Luke, says that there are several Greek words used in the Bible that are translated “Love” in English, but each has a different meaning.

Eros is passionate love, including physical attraction to another.

Philia – means affection for a close friend.

Agape – means unconditional love. Barclay writes that *agape*, which is the Greek word used here, “means that no matter what a person does to us we will never allow ourselves to desire anything but his or her highest good; and we will deliberately and of set purpose go out of our way to be good and kind to him or her.”

David Wilkerson, who is perhaps most famous for his book *The Cross and the Switchblade* has said that “Love is not only something you feel, it is something you do.”

Perhaps it is that understanding which leads Jesus to instruct his hearers to “Do good” and to bless and pray for those who hate, curse and hurt you.

I think Jesus understands that what he is asking is easier said than done, which may be why he adds these action words to his instruction. So we can't simply pay loving our enemies lip service.

Stepping back a little and looking at these "easier said than done" instructions of Jesus we can see Jesus sharing a look at what the Kingdom of God or the Reign of God looks like and what it doesn't look like.

Much of the world we live in operates in a "quid pro quo" system of relating to others. You do for me and I'll do for you or vice versa. Jesus recognizes this is how the world operates and he also recognizes how this falls short of living in the Kingdom of God.

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."

Jesus is critiquing here those who may be doing good, but are operating under the reign of this world, and Jesus is calling for

something more.

In a brief, but interesting commentary on this week's lectionary readings, Mary McGlone, brought Jesus critique into more modern times when she wrote,

Today, Jesus looks at us and says, 'What credit do you expect for loving those who are good to you? The Mafia is famous for doing that much – in fact, they may well outdo you in caring for their own!'

Jesus is calling for something more.

He says, ³⁵ "But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return."

This is what living in the Kingdom of God looks like.

Yes, but, it's easier said than done.

If that is indeed the case what are we to do?

Will we give up our resentments? Do we care enough about the poor to give up our comforts and maybe more? Are we willing to try to understand people with whom we strongly disagree?

The challenge of Jesus instructions is to believe that this alternative that Jesus offers, that this Kingdom of God is possible now.

But how? Where is the YouTube video that lays out the steps for the “You just...”

Well, I’m sorry to tell you that there is no YouTube video that I’m aware of. And even if there was I think we would find ourselves saying “easier watched than done.”

It reminds me of a story that is told a little later in Luke about a rich young ruler who comes to Jesus looking for eternal life, which I think equates to living in this Kingdom of God that Jesus is sharing. He comes feeling pretty good about himself and that he is following all the rules. Jesus recognizes this, but he calls for something more:

“There is still one thing lacking. Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” The rich young ruler may have said to himself, “Well, Jesus, that is easier said than done, because I have lots of stuff.” And he walks away.

Commenting on what happened, Peter asks Jesus, “Who can be saved?” Or perhaps in other words, how can anyone actually live in the Kingdom of God?

Jesus responds, “What is impossible for mortals is possible for God.” In that answer I think comes an answer to our question of what are we to do? How do we get done, what Jesus asks us to do? It is not by our will, but by a transforming of our heart, which is a work of God. It’s not what you or I can do, but what God can do in and through us.

When I was newly appointed as pastor to the United Methodist Church in Gaylordsville during my last semester in seminary, I vividly remember going into the sanctuary one evening and kneeling at the altar rail. This was probably just a week or two into my appointment.

I remember being there in that dimly lit sanctuary and saying out loud to God, “I can’t do this.” I don’t remember saying this then, but I could have also said, “Pastoring a church is easier said than done.” But what I remember saying is “I can’t do this.”

And I heard God say in response, “You’re right. You can’t do this.” God didn’t say it was impossible, but left to my own devices it likely was.

God did say, “You can’t do this.” But he also went on to say, “I can do this through you.”

- Love your enemies!
- Do good to those who hate you.
- Bless those who curse you.
- Pray for those who hurt you.
- If someone slaps you on the cheek, offer the other cheek also.
- If someone demands your coat, offer your shirt also.
- Give to anyone who asks; and when things are taken away from you don't try to get them back.

Easier said than done Jesus. I don't know if I can do this.

And he may still say the words I heard 27 years ago, "You're right, but I can do this through you." If I am willing to listen. If I'm willing to let God change my heart. Because that's what I think it will really take. It's not a matter of my will, it's a matter of my heart.

With this in mind I'd like to close by sharing a prayer by American author, theologian, and civil rights leader Howard Thurman.

May it be our prayer this morning:

I want to be more loving in my heart! It is often easy to have the idea in mind, the plan to be more loving. To see it with

my mind and give assent to the thought of being loving – this is crystal clear.

But I want to be more loving in my heart! I must feel like loving; I must ease the tension in my heart that ejects the sharp barb, the stinging word. I want to be more loving in my heart that, with unconscious awareness and deliberate intent, I shall be a kind, a gracious human being. Thus, those who walk the way with me may find it easier to love, to be gracious because of the Love of God which is increasingly expressed in my living.

May it be so.