

## Sermon for Epiphany 7 2022 -Luke 6:27-38

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be pleasing to you O Lord.

A reporter was interviewing an old man on his 100th birthday. "What are you most proud of?" he asked. "Well," said the man, "I don't have an enemy in the world." "What a beautiful thought! How inspirational!" said the reporter. "Yep," added the centenarian, "outlived every last one of them."

When I first read the text for today, I thought to myself, oh my. What a great text for annual meeting Sunday. Then I thought about it once more and thought to myself, "Yes. This IS a GREAT Sunday to preach on this text. The story itself has two specific thoughts that are important to address. The "turn the other cheek" passage and "love your enemies as yourself". I will get to that in a bit. First, I want to address the larger picture.

Today we again find Jesus preaching on the Plain at the same level of his disciples. He's on the same playing field. He is their PEER. He gives an intro to the text encouraging the people to listen to what he has to say.

"Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you."

There are a number of what are called conditional sentences that follow like: "If this happens then this happens." Here is the result.

For example, "bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you."

If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other.

If anyone takes your coat, give them your shirt.

If anyone who begs from you, do not ask anything of them.

Now I don't know about you but that is big list to start with.

Jesus gives us "the Golden Rule" then says to the people then "Do to others as you would have done to you."

He goes on to say (I paraphrase) lend to sinners, love your enemies, do good, do not judge, do not condemn but forgive and expect nothing in return for we're all sinners. Your reward will be great. Be merciful as your father is merciful.

We all know the golden rule "do to others as you would have done to you."

Do we hear it though? DO WE LIVE IT?

Sometimes people can say the harshest things not realizing the pain they are causing others. As a community of believers ready for an annual meeting we are called to remember these words today – and always.

This is my first annual meeting with you all, but I've been a part of many, many, AGM's and some have been very loving and productive while others became disasters.

I've been a part of one annual meeting that became a ridiculous shouting match. It accomplished nothing. I've been a part of meetings where groups have come prepared to pit themselves against another. What is the use of this? How does this represent Jesus' golden part of the purpose of an AGM is to share the business of the prior year. It's also an opportunity to ask questions and be heard. A chance to truly listen to one another. Jesus asks us to love one another.

At the same time that I say this, there is one thing that is very important and we must try to do as the body of Christ. We always must try to speak the truth in love. How we speak to others is oh so important. How we hear things is important too. We must practice patience and listen closely. When we love each other we should speak to one another with respect. Listen to each other. Find a way to be One. That is the **only** way we are able to turn the other cheek.

When we do not speak the truth in love, the words and actions of one group can be abusive to others. It is tempting to use our words harshly against one another, harshly especially when we are feeling frustrated and heard. It is often difficult to turn the other cheek always. We are not called to be punching bags. We are to treat each other with love not pain.

The annual meeting today is necessary for the business of the church. I believe what our annual report shows to everyone is that even over the last year while struggling through covid, being without a pastor for 5 months, some really good things have been going on. I have gotten to know many of you in more ways than one whether visiting at home when possible, over the phone or here at church. It has been a pleasure and I am looking forward to meeting more of you now that many of the restrictions are being lifted.

Our ministries are regrouping. A new Family and Youth Ministry Committee has formed to address a dire need in the congregation for a younger generation to be fed. A new worship service in the parish hall is on the horizon. A pastoral care group is getting organized once more. The regular ministries are doing well.

Zion has lots to look forward to in 2022. I hope you will gain a renewed perspective on the happenings at Zion Lutheran Church. Please remember to love one another and treat each other with respect. Remember it is okay to disagree about issues as long as we speak the truth in love. For God in Christ has called us to do so.

Amen.