

The 7th Sunday after Epiphany
“Loving all as Sons and Daughters of the Merciful Most High”
Luke 6:35-36
February 23, 2025
Rev. Ed Weber

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our text for the 7th Sunday after Epiphany is from our Gospel reading, Luke 6:35-36

“35 But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. 36 Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.”

So far the text...

Love. As I told the children in their message, we just celebrated Valentines Day. We showered the people we love and are closest to with lots of chocolate, flowers, balloons, cards, a special dinner, maybe even a trip to Zales...There's a lot of different ways to say and show that you love someone, whether it is your spouse, boyfriend or girlfriend, friend or member of your family. Businesses know we want to do this and so it's a win/win for them and us, isn't it? It's a concept that easily understood by all.

But then comes our text and it's a real eye opener, isn't it? Love your enemies...yes, enemies. Jesus even helps describe them better for us, doesn't He...the ungrateful people, the evil people, people who hate you, curse you, steal from you...basically, anyone who harms you in some way.

It's not hard to picture evil in this sinful world. Innocent hostages held in the tunnels in Gaza for over a year...fires purposely started in California, looters, a drive-by shooting in Mercedes...and those who curse you, speak lies about you, hate you...use social media to cause harm to your reputation...Jesus says love them too, pray for them, do good to them.

Yes, Jesus says it twice in our text, doesn't He? For emphasis...

“27 ‘But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you.’”

I say to you. This is Jesus speaking with Divine authority. He’s speaking to all Christians, you and me included. So we better pay attention and do what Jesus is telling us to do.

That’s eye opening isn’t it? For the worldly concept of dealing with evil is different from the Christian concept that Jesus lays before us. In Matthew 5, our parallel reading, Jesus says:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ 44 But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, 45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven”

Why? Because as sons and daughters of our Father, we need to think as He thinks and act as He acts. And how does our Father act? **“He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”** God shows universal love to all.

Again, Jesus tells us the worldly concept first in Matthew 5. **“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’** What is the thinking of the world? Revenge. For as much as I have been harmed, I need to exact equal harm. But that’s not Jesus’ answer to evil. He tells us not to be vengeful...not to pay evil for evil.

“39 But I tell you not to resist an evil person.” Don’t oppose them by returning evil for evil. Instead, love them. And the word that Jesus uses for “love” is a special word. Agape. Agape love is sacrificial love.

To pray for someone who harms you, do good to them, bless them, forgive them, and be merciful to them requires sacrifice...extraordinary sacrifice and a humbling of your spirit.

You know the world has this concept called “pay it forward”. You’ve maybe heard people say this phrase “pay it forward” because, well, you’re making “good karma” for yourself, and eventually what you pay forward will come back to you! That’s the idea. You do something good because you EXPECT good to then come back to you.

I was watching a YouTube video of a young man who was trying to use this idea at a McDonalds drive thru. He got to the window to pay his bill and then said to the cashier, “And pay for whatever the car behind me gets too”. What did he do next? He got back in the drive-thru line and ordered again. He was hoping that the idea of paying it forward would continue through the drive thru and he’d get a free meal the second time around. Did it work? No. He was a little disappointed.

But, the Christian concept of agape love, Jesus’ command to love, doesn’t expect anything in return. Christian love doesn’t look for anything in return. So Jesus says in our text:

“But if you love those who love you, what credit 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 credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. 34 And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back.”

We see that Jesus’ command to love is other worldly. It’s based solely on the love that we know only from the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. For it is undeserved love. It is therefore grace. It is mercy. It is why Jesus could call the poor in spirit – blessed...because the poor soul, filled with sin and evil, receives not what is deserved – eternal condemnation – but blessedness in Jesus, forgiveness and salvation – the Gospel!

The sacrificial love of Jesus is this: Instead coming to condemn, He came to save by giving His life for all people...universal sacrificial love for all! He didn’t repay evil for evil, but He turned the other cheek, by allowing sinful men to crucify Him. And by Jesus crucifixion, His death and resurrection He conquered evil!

So we sang in our sermon hymn:

“851 Lord of Glory, You Have Bought Us

*Lord of glory, You have bought us With Your lifeblood as the price,
Never grudging for the lost ones That tremendous sacrifice; And with that have freely
given Blessings countless as the sand To the unthankful and the evil
With Your own unsparing hand.*

What does our Psalm 103 tell us today about our God?

“The Lord is merciful and gracious, Slow to anger, and abounding in mercy.

9 He will not always strive with us, Nor will He keep His anger forever.

10 He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our iniquities.”

He has not punished us according to our iniquities, but done something other worldly that He could only do. Listen to the next verses of great comfort.

“For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; 12 As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us. 13 As a father pities his children, So the Lord pities those who fear Him.”

So great is His mercy to you and me! He shows His continual love to you and me by daily forgiving me and washing our sins away in our baptism. He mercifully gives to us His very body and blood to eat and drink for remission of our sins. Undeserved sacrificial love, the very body and blood that was offered on the cross for you! Agape love!

This love conquered evil. It conquered death so that we can with all confidence know from our epistle reading in 1 Corinthians 15 that will rise again.

“For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. 23 But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming. 24 Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. 25 For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. 26 The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.”

What great love and mercy moved God to do this for you and me! Listen to Psalm 103...

“For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust.

15 As for man, his days are like grass; As a flower of the field, so he flourishes.

16 For the wind passes over it, and it is gone,

And its place remembers it no more. 17 But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting On those who fear Him, And His righteousness to children’s children,”

Though you may be mistreated, hated, harmed, persecuted, cursed in your life, your reward is great in heaven...thanks to the love of Christ!

And that is what transforms our thinking, to be more like Christ's thinking...merciful to others, both good and evil people, doing good to others, praying for all and living the sacrificial love of Jesus to all in word and deed. For Jesus love is universal and constant to all, including you.

It is our prayer that we sing in our sending hymn:

"844 Lord of All Nations, Grant Me Grace

*Lord of all nations, grant me grace To love all people, ev'ry race;
And in each person may I see My kindred, loved, redeemed by Thee.*

*With Thine own love may I be filled And by Thy Holy Spirit willed,
That all I touch, where'er I be, May be divinely touched by Thee.*

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Amen

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Amen. (Philippians 4:7)