**February 24, 2019**

**Luke 6:27-38**

This passage is a recipe for Christian discipleship. Jesus told the disciples and those gathered around him that he needed more than their best intentions on their best days. Jesus asked his followers to practice sacrificial living: love your enemies, bless those who curse you, give more than what people take for themselves. Essentially, “do to others as you would have them do to you.” It was a tall request.

These words are so well known that they have wormed their way into cartoons and home decorating items and public school lessons. We have been conditioned to thinking that this is a reasonable expectation for Christians and people in general. It’s just common decency. It’s how people *should* treat one another, honoring basic human dignity. Specifically, however, these words weren’t said by Jesus to just anyone. They weren’t even said to the Pharisees (the people whom we could loosely call Jesus’ “enemies”). Jesus gave these instructions to his followers. These are his expectations for his family. These are the ingredients that will carry his disciples to their eternal feast: love, honor, generosity, humility, mercy. And if you do these things, “Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High.”

In this way – when you do these things which you should do *just* to be faithful – you will be given more. When you do these things, you will be given a place at the Table and a role in the family. When you “give, it will come back to you. A good measure [of love and honor and generosity and humility] -- pressed down, shaken together, and running over -- when you give [this, you give] to the Lord.” This pleases the Lord, so the Lord wants to give back to you.

My family loves to cook and eat and serve and share food. The rituals of food preparation and serving and savoring are very important, involving everyone in some form or fashion. Since I was a little girl (probably a toddler?) I stood at the kitchen counter while my mother (or father or grandmother or some older relative) chopped and stirred and prepared food beside me. Baking sugar cookies was a particular favorite at each turn of season. After mixing the dough, we fetched our old wooden rolling pin to stretch and press down the dough into one smooth sheet. We brought out cookie cutters to fit the season – hearts for February, flowers for March, ovals for Easter eggs, pumpkins for Halloween – and transformed the plain dough into a line of characters soon to be decorated with bright colors. The whole process stands in my mind as a heavenly afternoon – the mixing and making, the dusty countertops, and of course, the smell of baking butter! These were wonderful happy hours.

But as any baker knows, you can have all the right ingredients, you can follow the instructions to a letter, but you are not guaranteed a beautiful or tasty result. Just as I have happy memories of baking sugar cookies, I also have memories of my mother frustrated at her oven’s mis-calibrated temperature. I remember loaves of bread not rising and cakes falling. It wasn’t her lack of skills. Cooking disasters just happen. In the last year, Adam tried a new recipe for meatballs wherein he swore that he did everything correctly. But whereas the recipe picture had a plate of meatballs on sauce, his meatballs *became* the sauce – serving up a plate of mysterious swampy chunky stuff. It was a fail. In trying a new BBQ sauce last summer, I created an epic grill fire that left us with an overly charred and unpalatable dinner. It was a fail. And almost anytime I have to decorate a cake, I finish with something that looks less edible than the naked cake, and less coordinated than a preschooler’s artwork. I am a walking decorating disaster.

Coming back to the scripture, in God’s faithful family, Jesus asks each disciple not only to give and do for other people, but to give and do these things for God. Love, bless, and give. When we give [this, we give] to the Lord. So each disciple is doing this faithful work for God (not for the benefit of humankind or for the betterment of the world, though it will certainly do those things). They are relinquishing ownership over the goodness and giving the blessing to God. In doing this faithful work, each disciple brings humble ingredients to the eternal feast which Jesus is cooking up. Jesus is the executive chef directing traffic – pressing, shaking, stirring – so that the rest of the family will have something tasty to eat. We will be fed because Jesus is doing the cooking, not just because the ingredients were in the kitchen. We each contribute something – the salt or sugar or even taking out the trash – that presses down, shakes together, and runs over into something better than we could have imagined. We aren’t being loving just to add positivity to the world. We aren’t being generous just to pay it forward. We are doing these things because Jesus is preparing a heavenly banquet. When we do these things, Jesus gives back a good measure to feed us in body, mind, and soul.

So many people say that we should be nice, we should be kind, we should be generous because the world needs more goodness. Well, yes, it does. But that’s not why we do these things. We don’t work for the world. We serve Jesus. And being nice for Jesus, being kind for Jesus, being generous for Jesus has far different implications than doing so “*for the world*.” The ingredients themselves even look different and taste different when they are done for God.

Congregations themselves are made of different ingredients. As we read last month in Paul’s letter to the Corinthians[[1]](#footnote-1), there are ingredients of wisdom, faith, healing, prophecy, apostles and teachers within groups of Christians. But without the gift of love, these ingredients are useless. So that wisdom within God’s kingdom is quite different from wisdom in the business world. Give all that have and more, love your enemies, bless those who curse you – this is far different teaching than what the world gives. These ingredients lead to a very different meal than what the world serves.

More commonly, at Sweet Hollow we talk about gifts of leadership and teaching and mission and such. We see the gifts of creativity and music and problem solving and engineering (tending to building repairs and property needs and such). Each of these ingredients is needed to keep the church up and running – not for its own sake, mind you, but for the sake of Christ and the gospel. We bring our ingredients to church each week, prayerfully asking God to fix them into a feast that will feed us and those around us. We don’t show up and insist on cooking it our way; we need God’s guidance preparing a meal for this hungry world. So we pray, “What plans does God have for us? What dish is God cooking up next?”

Our church officers are on the front lines as they share their own gifts, seek to best use others’ gifts, and prayerfully discern what God is asking of us now. They cannot do it alone. They need everyone’s support and prayers, and they need God’s vision. We want to give – not just give to be nice. We want to give to God, and we pray that we will receive a good measure in return. We want to feed hungry neighbors, and we pray that we will be fed in the giving and sharing. We want our community to enjoy the gifts of this property, and we pray that we will be able to stay and enjoy it indefinitely ourselves. We want to teach our members and visitors – old and young – and we pray that we will learn more about God as we listen and ask questions together.

One of the challenges of cooking is that the raw ingredients look different once they are pressed down, shaken together, and running over. You wouldn’t know that sugar cookies need a little pinch of salt. You wouldn’t expect vinegar in a chocolate cake. And yet, with Jesus in the kitchen, our simple ingredients become a glorious, decadent feast leaving everyone licking their fingers for more.

Thanks be to God for giving us a good measure to use and share. “Give and it will come back to you when you give to the Lord.” Stay on the watch for what God is giving back to us!

1. 1 Corinthians 12 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)