

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Seventh Sunday after Epiphany - Year C

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Genesis 45:3-11, 15

Psalm 37:1-11, 39-40

I Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-50

Luke 6:27-38

02/24/2019

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke:

[Jesus said:] 27“But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. 29If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. 30Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. 31Do to others as you would have them do to you.

32“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. 33If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. 34If 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. 35But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your

reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. ³⁶Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

³⁷“Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; ³⁸give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.”

The Gospel of our Lord.

Prayer

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable to you O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Loving

Good morning! Love your enemies... turn the cheek... In the fifth grade, things were a little rough between myself and another kid named Dale. We didn't get along, and finally come spring, things finally went far enough and as we walked home from school we decided to have ourselves a good old fashioned fist fight. I don't think either of us won, but it cemented something between the two of us... we hated each other. We took a break the following year - I think we both fought someone else in the sixth grade. But when the seventh grade came along, we were back at it, and by the time the spring came back around, we once again met on some side street on the way home to duke it out. These fights never really lasted very long, and we weren't injured.

But things took a much more serious tone come eighth grade. We weren't "kids" anymore, our bodies were a little stronger, and the insults a little more "adult." As we walked down a small flight of stairs after school was over, he was behind me and decided

to throw an insult my way... to which I retaliated by grabbing him and throwing him down the flight of stairs. This would have been fine, except he grabbed my leg on the way past and I fell down the 10-15 stairs too. When we hit the ground we jumped up, this time landing a few serious blows before someone broke the fight up. We both attempted to flee, but the assistant principal found us, and that's how I got my first, and only, taste of suspension.

“[Jesus said:] 27“But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. 29If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also.”

If you thought last week was a tough text to handle, just wait for today! One commentator writes that we *“respond to this text in the same way [their] children respond to seeing cooked spinach on their plate. No matter how much [they] explain the nutritional value, no one around the table really wants to dig in... There is a vast difference between what we want and what we need.”*¹ As I said a week ago, we pick up the text today exactly where we left off last Sunday. We find ourselves in the Gospel of Luke, amidst Jesus' “Sermon on the Plain.” If you missed last week's sermon, make sure you check it out on the website, I would rate it a full 10 out of 10. Jesus is teaching, the whole crowd can hear but he is directing his message specifically to the disciples, and that's a detail we need to remember. If we want to be a follower of Christ, heed his message for us here. As I proclaimed the Gospel a few minutes ago the phrase *“to you that listen”* in verse 27 jumped out at me. It's a striking reminder that we can choose to

¹ Bartlett, David L., and Barbara B. Taylor. *Feasting on the Word Year C, Volume 1*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008. p. 381

ignore what Jesus is saying, that is a possibility. But I wonder if that choice leads towards genuine faith.

But it's at this point that we need to deal with a small problem that arises within the text: the context. A lot of scripture can be unraveled to become understandable and applicable to a modern audience, but with today's text, we are not the intended audience. The message that Jesus shares with the community all those years ago, and the original audience that the Gospel writer is thinking about, are the oppressed. Today, on the other hand, we sit together in a society that was heavily influenced by Christian values, in a country that protects our freedom, as part of a country that is arguably the strongest nation in the whole world. The message that Jesus shares is more for those we ignore than for you and I. Dr. R. Alan Culpepper in 2015 summarized last week's text and today's arguing that *"These principles are diametrically opposed to the assumptions of the marketplace and media that shape American culture: The wealthy are privileged, and conflict requires that one show strength through retaliation. Our heroes, therefore, are usually neither poor nor non-violent. As a result, the power of materialism and the quest for possessions have increased dramatically during this century, and violence in our homes, schools, and streets is rampant."*²

No, our heroes are rarely the poor or non-violent. Which begs the question; what are we to do with this text? To start, let's break down some of the text. Fred Craddock comes to our rescue: *"This unit contains two parts. The first, verses 27-31, lay down the general principle that Jesus' followers do not reciprocate, do not retaliate, and do not draw their behavior patterns from those who would victimize them... The second part*

²Keck, Leander E. *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary Volume VIII*. Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2015. p.122.

*of this unit (vv. 32-36) repeats from a different perspective the principles of the first part... In other words, just as one's life-style is not determined by the enemy, neither is it determined by the friend.*³

He hits right at the two hammer blows that this text delivers right?! First, we are to love our enemies in ways that are completely alien to the hearer. We have that in common with the original audience at least, anyone listening to Jesus 2,000 years ago would have been just as challenged as we are today. What does that look like? Well we've all heard the example of loving Hitler, but that's been overused. I've used members of ISIS in the past. What does love look like for Hoda Muthana? If that doesn't drive it home hard enough, one commentary uses three different examples: How about the "good thief," "good batterer," or the "good molester."⁴ The mere thought makes me sick to my stomach, and yet Jesus commands it. And it's that point that is flipped around again with the reminder that loving our friends means nothing. Of course it's easy to be nice to those who treat us well! It means nothing when we have the promise of a mutual return in the relationship. Within just a few short verses the greatest challenge that any of us could face has been thrown down before us... So how will we respond?

I want us to try something, and delivering this message to a room full of service members might be a little tricky, but bear with me. I've heard the arguments for why this passage just isn't realistic, how it just can't be done. As my story in the beginning made it clear, I'm no stranger to fighting. I've shot guns, and I even own a few. I would

³Craddock, Fred B. *Luke*. Louisville, Ky: John Knox Press, 1990. pp. 89-90.

⁴Bartlett, David L., and Barbara B. Taylor. *Feasting on the Word Year C, Volume 1*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008. p. 383.

be willing to use those weapons to defend myself or my family if I needed too. I'm with you, this passage just doesn't seem possible... but what would it look like if we tried?

That's my challenge for all of us, including myself. Over the next few weeks stop and think about how it might change our lives if we were to internalize these words and live them out? I mentioned last week that a trait I admire is the ability to at least admit that the right way might be the harder, more impossible option.

Which brings me to Dale. We avoided each other whenever we could. But by the time senior year came around we found ourselves at a Halloween party. Our high school football team had just lost to our rivals at the last game of the season. It was the worst possible way for Dale to end his high school football career. During the night I walked outside and saw him sitting at the fire just staring at it, lost in thought. I felt bad for the man. The camaraderie of senior year had been wearing at our armor and by the end of the night a bizarre scene took place. Another friend who had sprained his ankle in the field was unable to walk... and so Dale and I carried him under each arm, to the car. For one night, united together under a common cause. Did we become best friends? Definitely not... but it was a small first step.

Loving our enemies... it seems impossible, doesn't it? The reality of Jesus' command seems insanely unlikely... and yet we've never actually tried it, have we? I've heard a hundred thousand arguments for why we shouldn't... but what if we tried it anyway? What might that look like? Amen.