

Sermon – Diocese - 20th February 2022

Love your enemies.

Luke 6:27-38

Andrew Lloyd Webber wrote a musical titled the aspects of love. One of the main pieces of music is “Love Changes everything” and it indicated that with love true love, unconditional love we can change our world and overcome our difficulties, starting with ourselves. I feel these words also epitomizes what the theme of our readings are today.

Also, Paul in 1 Corinthians 13 states that if we do not have love then we are nothing more than an empty gong. In other words, without love our lives are hollow. Paul goes on to say that this love he speaks of is the basis of all our relationship. Relationships with God and with each other

In our old testament reading we have the story of Joseph a man who was pampered by his father, and yet maligned by his brothers for his superior attitude. The brothers were so fed up with Joseph that they sold him into slavery and made up story that he had been eaten but wild animals.

As we know Joseph ended up in Egypt where he is falsely accused of attacking his master’s wife, thrown into prison for a time. This is a time of learning for Joseph as he reflects on his situation and communicates with God. Finally, Joseph is released and ends up as 2nd only to Pharaoh in power throughout all of Egypt. So, when the brothers come seeking food because of the drought Joseph had a chance for payback, and who could blame him.

However, the lesson in this story is one of forgiveness. Instead of using his power to extract his pound of flesh he shows mercy and forgives them and is reconciled to/with them.

Some Biblical commentators compare Joseph to God. That is, God has the right and power to punish us and we deserve it; but rather than punish us, God has freely and generously forgiven us, restored the relationship with us and has abundantly and freely blessed us, just as Joseph did to his brothers. God could

have punished us but didn't and so Joseph is parallel to God and God's forgiveness and blessings, freely given through his unconditional love.

In our Gospel lesson for today we are invited to "love our enemies and do good to them who persecute you;" to be "merciful and abundant in our forgiveness," and God will reward us for such a life.

This story of Joseph challenges us to do the same when we are faced with a similar situation or sibling rivalry.

Then we have Jesus challenging us to love our enemies and to do good to those who hate us. We could be excused for thinking, is he kidding, I mean does he want us to love those who caused us trouble – both inside and outside the church family, or who have broken up our relationships, or have shafted us in business, in general those who have caused us grief?

In answer to this Jesus is saying yes, and when you do go the extra mile, go help them and without thought of payback.

These instructions are in your face, for they are counter cultural to the way we humans generally act. We tend to look for recompense, retribution or an eye for an eye.

Also, we are often challenged in our everyday world to go along with fashion or contemporary thinking and to conform to a society that is hostile to what we believe and hold on to. Yet we hear Jesus challenge us to "*Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you*". A tough call.

I mean our reading continues "If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat, do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you, and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again."

Come on now, is that the way we think? In not our first thoughts after the event normally about pay back, getting even and so on? Let's be realistic, if someone takes away all my goods, then I surely won't be able to give to everyone who begs from me. It doesn't make sense.

Jesus then says for us to love others as we would have them love us. This is often referred to as the Golden Rule and sounds like good advice and makes sense, but is it?

These words are not unique to Jesus; indeed, they're found not only in Luke and in Matthew but in the writings of Homer and Seneca and Philo. This is the kind of wisdom we learned in kindergarten when the teacher told us to treat other people the way we'd like to be treated.

Whilst it is tempting to stand on this verse alone, we cannot. We need to read it in context of where Jesus became with the statement for us to "Love our Neighbours

Jesus says it not only once but repeats it again a few verses later. "But love your enemies; do good and lend, expecting nothing in return." Thus, the Golden Rule applies even when we sense that someone won't treat us the way we'd like to be treated. This is where the rubber hits the road.

Yet this is what Jesus is talking about, for it is those who dislike you for what you believe, who persecute you, whom Jesus wants you to love. To do this requires forgiveness for those who are persecuting you/me, and for ourselves.

Also, in this passage Jesus is calling us to something quite different, quite radical. Jesus is also asking us to be generous to a fault. This means says our lives are to be lives that are lived with a 'reckless generosity'. Jesus really does mean we should be giving to people who need it. However, Jesus doesn't say anything about making sure they use it for the right purpose. Thus, our passages today are an invitation to be generous and to forgive.

In the Joseph story, the enemies are the half-brothers who tried to kill him, and Joseph responds to them with the love and forgiveness that is described in today's New Testament lesson for what they had done to him.

So should forgive and do so from the heart, the heart of Jesus that abides in each one of us who say we belong to Jesus.

In the name of The Father & The Son & The Holy Spirit
Rev'd Mike Perrott

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