

Sermon – February 20, 2022

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Luke 6:27-38

It's easy for us to forget that Jesus Christ was a revolutionary. We preach his message of love, and remember his ministry as a shining light of kindness, generosity, acceptance, and forgiveness... but even as we approach the month of March and the season of Lent—which ends with Good Friday, when we remember the day Christ suffered and died—it's easy for us to overlook the reason the Romans decided to kill him in the first place.

Because Jesus *was* a revolutionary. He represented a *change*, and not just in a way of thinking. Jesus began a movement—Jesus rang out a call to action to turn humanity's entire way of *life* on its head. Jesus inspired people to revolutionize the world; to change what we do, how we do it, and *why*.

In the face of a domineering Empire armed to the teeth that ruled half the known world, Jesus preached a vision of a *new* kingdom. A kingdom of abundant life where truth, compassion, curiosity, forgiveness, and service reign.

Jesus was playing with fire, and everybody knew it. Jesus *lit* a fire under the people who *met* him. He helped them imagine a society that was radically different than the one he found himself in. He promised a world where the first shall be last and the last shall be first, where those who have much give it up for those who have none, where we face violence with compassion and peace, and where we have nothing to lose but our chains.

Even if we'd never read the Bible before, we could probably guess how the Empire would react to that.

In our reading today from the Gospel of Luke, we heard again from Jesus the kind of words that confronted not only the way the *world* works, but the way that *people* in the world—*us*—operate on a daily basis. Jesus describes for us a way of life that is so contrary to the way we've always done it—and so contrary to common sense—that it seems ridiculous.

Stuff like: love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, turn the other cheek, and give to *everyone* who begs from you. If someone takes your coat, give 'em your shirt too, and for that matter, and if someone steals from you, don't ask for your stuff back!

Jesus spent a great deal of his ministry advocating for revolutionary changes to the way we live and relate to other people. In the world he hoped for, we would "love [our] enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return."

**Even if it doesn't seem to make sense to us, we're asked—we're *commanded*—to do *good* in the lives of others, even and *especially* if we don't expect *them* to do**

**good in *ours*. And even if what they're doing actually *hurts* us! In the end what matters is what we get from *God*, not what we get from other people.**

See, Jesus had high expectations for his followers. It's *easy* to "love those who love you." It's second-nature to "do good to those who do good to you." And society *itself* is *built* on lending "to those from whom you hope to receive." Jesus asked his followers to do *better* than that. To *love* those who hate you, to do good to *all*, and to give *without* expecting it to come back to you with interest. Jesus hoped for us to rise *above* our *natures*: how easy it is to judge and to condemn... how hard it is to forgive.

Even if it doesn't make *sense* to us, even though it can be *terrifying*, Jesus wanted us to be better than *good*... he wanted us to be *godly*.

And that can be an uncomfortable ask. Giving of ourselves so freely means going out on a pretty creaky limb sometimes. Following the way of Jesus *is* sometimes a risk. Doing the right thing can be uncomfortable. Something that rubs you the wrong way, pushes back against how you're used to operating, or is *completely* outside your experience or expectation.

But if it didn't work out, we wouldn't be here today. Because you know who's been lent something they can never pay back? Every last one of us. We have been given—freely—something we didn't earn: God's love.

The love of *God* is free. God *loves* each and every one of us, and we didn't have to do anything to earn that. And let's be real, we *can't* do anything to earn it. The love of the Creator, the One who existed before time and fashioned the universe and watches over cosmic infinity with power that exists beyond the very concept of quantity... we could *never* be good enough to pay back that God's love.

But again and again we see that that God loves us *anyway*. We hear the promise over and over in Scripture, and we experience it in our lives, if our hearts are open to it. All the times we fall short, all the times we make mistakes, the love of God is still *right* there with us.

But capitalism's in the DNA of our culture, and somewhere along the line our daddy told us "There's no such thing as a free lunch." We don't trust free stuff, and we don't like the idea of giving anything away to somebody who didn't *earn* it. There's always gotta be a catch.

But what good is our comfortable understanding of the way the world *works*, if it gets in the way of the *work* of *God*?

We as followers of Jesus are called to do good. Radical good. *Risky* good. Jesus calls us to do good in the in the lives even of people who won't do good in ours. People who aren't able to return the favor. Even people who deliberately choose *not* to return the

favor. And of course, people *you* don't *want* to help. Whether it's people who dress and act differently than you, or drug addicts, or the homeless, people of different races or homelands, different religions, Democrats or Republicans, criminals and convicted felons, people who... beg you to put on your mask *and* people who tell you to take yours *off*, people who honk at you the moment the light turns green, or roar their broken mufflers past your house with their windows down and their music blasting, or kids with wild hair and face tattoos wearing t-shirts for bands with names like Anthrax or Goatwhore.

Jesus wants us—actually *wants* us—to reach out with unconditional love, love that doesn't require anything in return... because *God* reached out to *us* with that same love.

All that should matter to us is what we get from God, not what we get from other people. That's the message Jesus shared that day in the Gospel of Luke. We do *good* in the lives of others, not because we expect them to do good in *ours*, but because *God* does it for us.

God loves you. What are you gonna do about it?

Amen.