

Psalm 37: 1-11, 39-40; Luke 6: 27-38 Beyond the Golden Rule

Of David.

- 1 Do not fret because of the wicked;
do not be envious of wrongdoers,
- 2 for they will soon fade like the grass,
and wither like the green herb.

- 3 Trust in the Lord, and do good;
so you will live in the land, and enjoy security.
- 4 Take delight in the Lord,
and he will give you the desires of your heart.

- 5 Commit your way to the Lord;
trust in him, and he will act.
- 6 He will make your vindication shine like the light,
and the justice of your cause like the noonday.

- 7 Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him;
do not fret over those who prosper in their way,
over those who carry out evil devices.

- 8 Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath.
Do not fret—it leads only to evil.
- 9 For the wicked shall be cut off,
but those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land.

- 10 Yet a little while, and the wicked will be no more;
though you look diligently for their place, they will not be there.
- 11 But the meek shall inherit the land,
and delight in abundant prosperity.

- 39 The salvation of the righteous is from the Lord;
he is their refuge in the time of trouble.
- 40 The Lord helps them and rescues them;
he rescues them from the wicked, and saves them,
because they take refuge in him.

These words of wisdom, guidance, assurance and promise are placed on the lips of David who was God's choice for the king of Israel. Before becoming the king, David had many enemies; he faced Goliath and fled from King Saul who sought his life. Once David was made the king, he had even more enemies and fought many a battle against neighboring tribes.

And he did not always do good. We all know the tragic story of how David schemed to have his own good and faithful soldier killed, so that he could take the man's wife Bathsheba for

himself. Even though he had been chosen by God, David's life was full of strife. He made many mistakes and turned to God in repentance time and again. He was no saint nor a naïve prince but a real human who contended with enemies, God's enemies, within himself, in his own heart, and out on the battlefields.

Yet, writing in the evening of his turbulent and messy life, David offered these words, witnessing to the absolute trustworthiness of God, who will act and defeat the wicked and save those who take refuge in God. This was God of David, tried and true.

And this God revealed in the Hebrew Scripture is the God whom Jesus called Father and taught us how we, too, are children of this God. When we listen to Jesus' teaching about the ways of the kingdom, it is the kingdom of this God Jesus is revealing to us.

Last week, we heard the first section of Jesus' Sermon on the Plains, his teaching about the way things are in the kingdom of God. Jesus named the conditions of suffering, of poverty, hunger, grief, persecution, and called them "blessed," but these are the very opposite of what I, along with the rest of the world, would consider "blessed." But Jesus says they are blessed because God is with them and will turn it all around for them; their hope is in God.

And Jesus issued warnings to those who were healthy and wealthy and living without a care in the world, because their "blessedness" depended not on God but on things that would inevitably fail them.

Does this mean we should not work to eliminate poverty, hunger and disease? By no means; when we fight these conditions, we join God in turning the world all around. "Counterculture" is the word that comes to mind whenever I hear Jesus talk about how things work in God's world.

So, let us continue listening to Jesus. He is still talking to the same crowd, that is, his disciples and all those who came to listen to him to be healed. These were the people whose hearts were open to Jesus. So, with them, let us open our hearts and hear now the Gospel of Jesus Christ according to Luke 6: 27-38

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.'

Here, Jesus is talking to a crowd who are open to imagining the world Jesus is offering to them. These instructions are not just some advice on how to be a good Christian in a world as it is; rather, they are an invitation to live as the children of God, to become the citizens of the kingdom of God, and in so doing transform the world. It's an invitation to join in God's salvific work of redeeming this world from the grip of the wicked under the reign of Evil.

And it begins with loving our enemies, Jesus says. Ok, "love your enemies",... we have heard this "expression," right? Ah, only if it were mere "expression" for encouraging generosity of one's spirit or something, but it is not. It is actually a command to be followed through with concrete actions: do good to those who hate you and bless those who curse you. Conventional wisdom says you should do harm to your enemies and good to your friends, but Jesus says love your enemies. There he goes again, the counterculture Jesus; he must actually mean it.

Bud all these concrete actions in Jesus instructs his followers to well, follow, --- turn the other cheek, if someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt, give to the one who asks of you, if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them back... Don't they amount to enabling bad behavior, or worse, "condoning evil?" I give, give, give and they take, take and take; is Jesus saying being an enabler and a doormat is being loving?

By no means; that would be bad counseling, a therapy session gone awry. But it is true that these words of Jesus, being in the Bible, have tragically been misused to keep the oppressed and the abused in the status quo of victimized state, rather than liberating the oppressed as well as the oppressors who are captive of their own tyrannical ways. It is all the more important to dig deeper into what Jesus really means by "Love Your Enemies," if we mean to follow the way of Jesus, the way of God.

If we remember that this commandment to love our enemies is an invitation to live in the kingdom of God, then it must involve transformation of us individually as well as our warring world. Conventional wisdom says you should do harm to your enemies and good to your friends, but that's a sure way to keep the hostility and violence in place; there would be no transformation. Something must shift.

Some version of the Golden Rule is found in most religions. Jesus and the gospel writers used ethical teachings that were popular in Greco-Roman, Jewish, and early Christian traditions. Here Jesus says, "Do to others as you would have them do to you." That is all well and good, but then he goes far beyond the ethical standards of his day, and in an unexpected direction.

Striking a person on the cheek was a denigrating action, but turning the other cheek would be just as dramatic and physical form of non-retaliation that breaks the cycle of violence; it's a rejection of the principle of retaliation. Jesus' command to not fight back is not sheer passivity but a clear action to defy hostility and reject violence. Not fighting back when someone has struck you is itself a loud statement that says I do not subscribe to the principle of retaliation nor speak your language of violence.

What Jesus is teaching here is a new response to hostility. "Peace through Strength" has no place in God's strategic peace plan, if by "strength" we mean violence or any power that oppresses and threatens the wellbeing the other. Now, if by "strength" we mean our strength to restrain our very human urge to "harm those who harm us," then, yes, such "strength" could save us from the perpetual cycle of violence. That is the shift that sets transformation in motion. And what sparks and then drives that motion? Love. That's why "love your enemy" must come first.

Love is not a vague kindly feeling for another but a commitment to the wellbeing of the other. And who is an enemy? An enemy is someone who opposes my being, let alone my wellbeing. This opposition, this hostility, creates and keeps this divide, an abyss, a chasm, between me and someone I'd call my enemy.... Love defies the hostility and its byproducts.

The beloved and esteemed African American writer Maya Angelou poetically described how the power of love unfolds. She wrote, "Love is that condition in the human spirit so profound that it empowers us to develop courage; to trust that courage and build bridges with it; to trust those bridges and cross over them so we can attempt to reach each other." These words from the minds and the lips of someone to whom the world was wildly a hostile place. God has put this love in the human spirit.

Jesus tells us to love our enemies, do good, and then we will be children of the Most High, for God is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Jesus would not tell us to do something he has not done himself, and what Jesus does is of God.

God's love for us is the love for enemy, for we behave as God's enemy more often than we're ready to admit, by resisting and opposing God's will, like, loving enemy. We are like King David, who had to confront the enemy within his own heart, as well as without.

And Jesus added to doing good, "lend, expecting nothing in return." In God's economy of love, there is no quid pro quo, but pure one-sided outpouring of love. It is possible to utterly reject the evil on one hand and love our enemies and commit to desiring what is best for them in the truest sense, and this will result in the transformation in the enemy.

Yet, we are so committed to our sense of "fairness," to the "quid pro quo" of the Golden Rule. When we give something away, even if it's something intangible as love, we want to make sure we break even, we're not cheated or shortchanged. All these human concerns and distrust get in the way of loving our enemies who couldn't care less about our wellbeing.

Jesus knows that, so he says "give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap." Go ahead, go beyond the Golden Rule and love your enemy in abandon. Our world today is full of opportunities to love our enemies. Go love them abundantly.

And remember the wisdom and assurance of King David in Psalm 37. Do not fret because of the wicked. Commit your way to the Lord, trust in God, and God will act. Thanks be to God.