

**Church of All Nations
Sunday February 23, 2025
Luke 6:27-38**

Today we are continuing on with Luke's version of what is the better known Sermon on the Mount from Matthew. Luke places Jesus' sermon "on the plain" and has some particular teaching and emphasis so we should not treat Luke's version as just a poor cousin to Matthew.

In today's portion there are some one liners that everybody loves and quotes -"Do not judge, and you will not be judged" and of course the absolute classic the golden rule +do to others what you want them to do to you."

But then some confronting things. The apparently innocuous line until you really think about it "the measure you give will be the measure you get back." Others just plain terrifying, "love your enemy". This is when, "loving one another" includes those who we find difficult to love or who disagree with us, or who we view not as "another" but as an "other."

This sort of stuff can provoke some strong and hostile reactions. It is quite weird how grace can provoke a strong backlash sometimes.

I have seen a couple of videos on Youtube lately of a guy called Mike with the mic - a street preacher who films himself and put it on his Youtube channel. He loves a bit of controversy and clashing with police and other authorities who try to shut him down.

His preaching is mostly classic hell fire and damnation - you know the kind of stuff... if you were to die today where would you spend eternity?"- sometimes I find it weirdly ... what...- like a scab you cannot stop picking. One woman took him to task and said you are all about sin and the devil and hell. Where's the love, compassion. He responded with, "You are one of those turn the other cheek Christians. Jesus was not like that." Perhaps forgetting it was Jesus who gave the teaching about turning the other cheek.

A number of religions teach Love of neighbour love of God but did anyone else say love your enemies?

Let's unpack it a bit. First, the issue may not be just the love your enemies bit but what does it mean to love in this context?

There may already be people here thinking they are being urged to have warm feelings of regard to people who have abused them.

Let's be clear I do not think for a minute Jesus is telling abused women and children to stay in violent relationships.

I do think he is urging us to be part of breaking the cycle of violence. I do think it means we do not return hostility with hostility. Jesus here overturns the principle of reciprocity which is I dish back to you precisely what I have been dealt - whether that be for good or evil. 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.

The most helpful thing to say is that to love someone is to wish, or will, the best for a person. Sounds pretty mundane for such a lofty concept as love doesn't it. But think about it. For you I wish the best outcome.

And maybe for a self absorbed bully or tyrant it means being called out, held to account for their actions, being punished not in a petty vengeful tit for tat manner but where the punishment is conveyed by appropriate authorities. Maybe they have a chance to ponder their actions, accept responsibility and repent and change. It may mean getting a kick up the backside and brought low so they can begin to climb from the gutter.

To love your enemy does not mean you have to spend time with them, like them, or even see them. Maybe one day you will be able to do all that but the Church too often has rushed to the first thing to be said is, You must forgive this person. That might be the 4th or fifth or 100th thing; never the first.

If we have been hurt many times in the past then we are not realistically in a fit state to love like this. To love like this (loving your enemies) requires something more. It is stepping up a few levels and may require long periods of practice and prayer and reflection and a dedication to be free from their tormentors and for some even professional help.

What about turning the other cheek when someone strikes us? It is said by some interpreters that turning the other cheek is an act of resistance. That sounds better than simply being a doormat. Nonviolent acts of resistance, such as those witnessed during the Civil Rights struggle. From turning the other cheek to giving one's coat or shirt, these are responses that may raise questions in the minds of the oppressors. It may be heaping red hot coals upon the unjust.

In order to love with God's kind of love you are not trusting or taking a risk that they will love you back. Whether they love you back or not is not in the equation. In fact Luke 6:32 infers they won't anyway. You are not dependent on their reaction. You are risking all on God not them. Their reaction is totally immaterial. You are risking your agape type love on God's faithfulness and God's ability to hold you firm even if they don't love you back. And what's more they probably won't. The fact of the matter is you can't change them. But in loving like this you are taking a risk that God will stand by you and you will be able to break free of the bonds of anger and revenge and reciprocity that keep you chained to the memory and the person of your tormentor.

This is not some kum by ya liberal, love your enemies because we love everybody and, you know, peace and hugs. We love in this way so that we may become children of God. So there's something deeply here about identity, what it means to belong to God's family. And because God is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked, and because God is merciful. So kindness and mercy are at the heart of the way. Jesus is talking about the divine here.