

Luke 6:27-38 7th Sunday after the Epiphany February 19, 1995

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.”

I remember George. One day he was suddenly in our third grade classroom. Quickly the word spread, George was dangerous. He had been in reform school. He was obviously big and strong. He had hurt someone.

I sensed that George was different from the day to day bullies that tormented us all. I went nowhere near George. In a short time he was gone, back to reform school it was rumored.

Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who persecute you.

I've always doubted that Jesus would apply these words to George. At least I have doubted that with my life. I can love the little enemies, the folks that choose to part their hair differently than I. I can do good to those who forget my birthday, I can bless the one who shouts in anger at me in the heat of a game of cards. I suppose I can even pray for someone who is talking behind my back.

But some people are just plain mean, they ride motorcycles and with bulging biceps draped with black leather. They tear and claw and rip everyone on their way to the top. Their eyes are cold and merciless as they inflict pain on others. Sometimes I wonder whether Jesus understood much about the real world.

Let's face it, Galilee nearly two thousand years ago was not Vietnam in 1969. Or Iwo Jima during World War II.

Mary was not the same as some mothers who lose their inhibitions to alcohol and shout and slap the infant child. Joseph did not come home filled with a day's frustrations and beat Jesus.

Jesus did not live in a neighborhood where drive-by shootings no longer made the front page of the daily newspaper. He did not endure a time as Rwanda did when whole villages were filled with the stench of death.

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. Do to others as you would have them do to you.

No, I don't think Jesus had ever met George. This kind of talk is okay in church, but you had better not take it out the door with you.

What's that you say? You think I ought to read on? You are right.

Here is Jesus weary and tired, seeking a little rest for himself and the crowd comes after him, asking more. And he gives.

And the more he gives the more they want, until they turn on him, cry crucify him. And now soldiers are blindfolding him, striking him on the cheek, one after another and mocking,

“Prophecy, who is it who struck you?”

A crown of thorns they are weaving, now pressing down until blood flows bright red like the pain he is suffering.

Now they have stripped away his coat and his shirt, left him naked, pounded nails into his hands and his feet. Now that he understands he will surely look for revenge. But what do we hear him say? “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” He is praying for them.

Jesus took his words out of the church, into the world, lived his words even with George.

But something more was happening.

Even as we humans showed just how cruel we can be, Jesus was placing himself between us and the wrath of God. For in that moment when Jesus was dying, God was pouring out all of his anger at you, and me - all of God's anger over all the sin that has been.

For God has had to listen as the screams of terror ascend as children have been cut open before their mother's eyes.

God has had to listen to tortured prisoners cry out to him for justice. God has listened to the hungry pleading for a crust as the rich feast a block away.

God has listened to the sobs of a woman beaten by the man who promised before God to love her.

God has been the only witness to the beating of an infant.

All the anger in God over all of that pain God poured out on us. But Jesus stepped between us and God. And when all the human abuse and all the divine wrath were spent Jesus hung on the cross limp - lifeless.

“Surely he was bruised for our transgressions; he was wounded for our iniquities.”

God was changed in Jesus dying. There is no more wrath for those who believe in Jesus. Jesus suffered all the anger of God over your sin - all the anger of God for all your sin for all time. Now God says God will only love you because of Jesus. And God will tenderly hold you as God tenderly held the lifeless body of Jesus and breathe life into you once more as he breathed new life into Jesus.

Eternal life is God's promise to you.

With that life comes an invitation to you....and a promise.

The invitation: to live as Jesus lived. To love your enemies, to do good to those who hate you, to bless those who curse you, to pray for those who persecute you.

And the promise: God will provide the power and the courage and the strength to live that invitation.