

Sermon / 23 February 2025 / Luke 6:27-38 / Really?

You've GOT to be kidding me, Jesus!

Really? Really.

There is just no way, Jesus. You're tired. You need a snack. That's it. You're hangry.

Because you cannot be serious.

Love my enemy. Do good to those who hate me. Bless those who curse me. Pray for those who abuse me.

C'mon. I'll do whatever else you want. But I just don't see how I can love my enemy. I'll do anything else.

So, Jesus doubles down: 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.

Sigh. I should have stopped while I was ahead.

My friends. It is not easy to be a Christian – or rather, I should say it is not easy to follow the teachings of Christ.

And to truly be a Christians, that is exactly what we must do. And here at St. Mark's Episcopal Church, we are going to do our level best to do what Jesus tells us to do and share those teachings with others with our words and or deeds.

Last week Fr. Christopher talked about the Beatitudes – those teachings.... those blessings....where Jesus turned the world upside down. Those who are hungry now will be filled and those who are satisfied now will be hungry. Those who are sad now will laugh and those who are doing well now will be sad.

Jesus doesn't let up during the sermon because today's passage about loving our enemies follows right behind those words from last week.

Because you see, Jesus is telling us what God's kingdom is like....SHOULD be like....WILL be like. And Jesus is telling us that this earthly world SHOULD be made into the kingdom of God. I know you've heard me say this many times before. Jesus tells us about the kingdom of God because he is telling us to make that happen. Right here. Right now.

But how?

Aye! There's the rub. That's the sticking point. Jesus tells us WHAT to do. Now it's up to us to figure out HOW to do it. Jesus didn't say it would be easy, Jesus just said, "If you want to truly be my disciples, you've got to do these things." Just do it.

It's clear that Jesus has more faith in us than we have in ourselves. We must have faith that God will help us with these difficult tasks.

Let's remember our baptismal covenant. We make promises to serve Christ in all persons, to love our neighbor (who could easily be an enemy) as ourselves, to strive for justice among all people and respect the dignity of every human being.

And after each promise we say we'll do it with God's help.

In today's Gospel lesson, Jesus tells those who are listening.....tells US....that it's all about love.

Love.

Those who are against us – our enemies – will try and taunt us into forgetting about that. Our enemies will do things to get us riled up – to make us angry. Those who are against us WANT us to hate them and curse them and abuse them because they know how strong those emotions can be. They want to get us so frustrated that we'll forget to love, do good, pray, and bless.

Don't let those who are against the teachings of Jesus get us down. Don't stoop to their level. Jesus is saying don't fight fire with fire.

Jesus says: don't hate, love....don't curse, bless....don't abuse, pray. Don't repay physical violence with more violence. If someone takes something, ask them what more they need. Be generous. Lend and don't expect something in return.

Treat others the way you want to be treated.

This is all about love. But I'd also like to point out that Jesus didn't tell us to be doormats – to let those who are not following these teachings have their way, walk all over us, and run roughshod through the Kingdom of God we're building.

We must stand up for what is right. We must push and fight for justice and equality. We must feed the hungry. We must clothe those who are naked. We must heal the sick. We must welcome the stranger.

Our enemies want more for themselves. They want to keep the hungry, naked, sick, "others" under their thumb. And they will do it with hate and abuse.

We cannot....we will not...let that happen.

Jesus is saying is that hating your enemies – abusing and cursing them – will distract you from getting done what needs to get done. You can battle wrong without hating who you are fighting. Hate takes so much energy and keeps us away from what we are called to do....because hate is the exact opposite of what we are supposed to do.

Jesus said, love your enemies. You don't have to like them. You certainly don't have to agree with them. But you must love them.

I remember a political gathering in Santa Fe several years ago. There was a supportive sign that read, "Viva la politician's name." A political commentator said, "I agree with that sign. I wish that politician a long, happy life. I wish them no harm. I just don't want them to be the president of our country."

I think that is what it means to love your enemy.

But it's easier said than done.

I'm going to take a chance and make this sermon extremely personal. It's not usually a good idea, but I want to share how to take today's gospel to heart.

As a gay, married man, I am frightened. There are people who want to take the matter of marriage equality back to the Supreme court. They would like to overturn the 2015 Obergefell decision giving same gender couples the right to marry. That decision passed by one vote. Seeing the make up of the Supreme Court 10 years later, I am terrified of what the outcome will be if those against marriage equality make it that far. What would it mean for my marriage? I know what it would mean for my queer siblings who want to get married in the future.

I consider those people my enemy. Those against me, my husband, and all members of the LGBTQ+ community... those who think we are less than...those who think we do not deserve the same rights as heterosexual people....those who want to deny us our hard-won rights.....

How do I love them? How?

I shared this because I want you to think of something similar in your life. Think of who you would consider an enemy to you. Who is against the very principles that make you who you are? Who is fighting to destroy the most important things you stand for?

And then consider how you could love them. Certainly, we ask for God's help in this seemingly impossible endeavor.

Being a Christian...being a follower of Jesus is difficult. We are called to do hard work and follow a path that is counter intuitive to our human nature.

Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. 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. Do not judge. Do not condemn. Give.

Here's how we do it, my friends. We do it with God's help and we do it in community. We do it together. When you feel it's impossible to love instead of hate, give me a call. Text me. Come to church and pray. Come to church and worship. You know what, we're here every Sunday! Make friends in coffee hour. Talk, chat. Meet during the week. None of us must travel this difficult Jesus-loving, Jesus-following road alone.

Stop moping. Stop doom scrolling through the news. Stop whining. Stop hating.

And love.

The musical *Les Misérables* is playing at Popejoy hall this weekend. As the musical reaches its dramatic ending and all the characters are returning to the stage, the lead character, Jean Valjean, sings, “to love another person is to see the face of God.” It’s a direct quote from the source novel written by Victor Hugo.

To love another person is to see the face of God.

Love your enemy. You’ll see the face of God. Maybe it won’t be your enemy’s face, but God will be there.