



SERMON
SCRIPTURE: LUKE 6:27-38
GRACE COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NC
Sunday, February 23, 2025
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Luke 6:27-38

6:27 "But I say to you who are listening: Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you;
6:28 bless those who curse you; pray for those who mistreat you. 6:29 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. 6:30 Give to everyone who asks of you, and if anyone takes away what is yours, do not ask for it back again. 6:31 Do to others as you would have them do to you. 6:32 "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. 6:33 If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. 6:34 If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive payment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. 6:35 Instead, 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 God is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. 6:36 Be merciful, just as God is merciful. 6:37 "Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; 6:38 give, 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."

Thank you for engaging in our truth telling practice today with your whole heart. The invitation today is to take these words attributed to Jesus to heart.

To any who will listen, he says, "love your enemies; do good to those who hate you; bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you."

He goes onto to unpack what this looks like and why this is important. Jesus is calling those who will listen to go over and beyond what is required by any other ethical systems and standards.

In his time, retribution would have been a well worn habit of the culture. If someone hurts you, make them pay.

That kind of retributive justice is a part of our culture today. It's ironic, even ridiculous, that so many people want to claim America is a Christian nation. We have never been a nation that followed Jesus' lead of love and repair.

Jesus was a messenger of reparative justice—and America much prefers retribution—even if meted out by vigilante's outside our justice system. And our justice system itself settles much more comfortably into retribution for harm done, rather than repair. But that is actually a sermon I've done before—and maybe a topic a future sermon can explore again.

Today, I want us to go even deeper into Jesus' instruction to love our enemies in our current cultural moment. It feels all too easy to pick out “the bad guys” these days. It's like we're in a bad movie—a movie with a cartoonish villain, at the controls of a machine built to create chaos and destruction, hellbent on making everyone who has ever mistreated him pay.

It's been another week of executive orders, firings—most notably in the last couple of days a major purge of America's military leadership. If you're not sobered up that this is all very serious, let's pour you a cup of coffee so we can all be awake and aware together.

The table is set in many ways for us to use our energy to talk about how bad things are, and all agree that Jesus tells us we even need to find room in our hearts to love even bullies and abusers. And we could all leave with a sinking feeling in our hearts that we're supposed to find a way not to give into the temptation to hate anyone.

But Jesus' words are much more difficult than how we feel about someone. Luke's Gospel is not using a word for love that is an emotion or a feeling, but a word that is an action word. Love is action, not simply a feeling.

“What credit is it to you,” Jesus says, “to do good to those who do good to you?”

“Love your enemies,” he says, “and expect nothing in return.”

So this isn't about changing the enemy or even reconciling with the enemy, but this is about our disposition toward the enemy—that it is somehow for us, for our own integrity, for our own peace, for our own freedom and liberation. We love our enemy because that is how we claim and live into our full humanity.

If we are God's people then our actions will reflect God's love. And God is kind and generous to the wicked and the ungrateful, Jesus says.

Remember last week we talked about how the wicked are like the chaff from the wheat—loosely connected, not connected deeply, like the trees beside the flowing stream. The wicked's actions do not have staying power, they are not well founded, they are not tapped into the truth—so they blow away in the wind, like the chaff from the wheat seed. They perish—not because of punishment, but because of cause and effect, because of the nature of wickedness—it is not made to last.

But here we are in the vice grip of wickedness having its day. Even if we can understand that wickedness is temporary, now Jesus is asking us to go the extra mile. He's telling us we need to love the ones doing the wickedness.

And that it's not just a feeling, but an action.

If we need to love them, then we need to see their humanity. And if we see their humanity, then we need to really look at them, make space for them. We need to see them as a part of us, not as other, not as monsters.

Jesus is telling us not to throw anybody away.

Now here's where progressive Christians lose the script a lot of the time. We think not throwing anybody away means avoiding conflict. We think not throwing anybody away means we have to allow them to keep doing the harm because we wouldn't want anyone to think we were mean or unloving or judgmental. We wouldn't want anyone to be mad at us. We wouldn't want there to be unnecessary unpleasantness just because we don't agree with what someone is doing or how they see the world.

This kind of passivity is not love! It is a lie. We try to dress it up as love, but it is really avoidance, it is really trying to bypass the hard work that is love. And it really shows that we continue to struggle to love ourselves—our whole selves. The harder we struggle to love all of our parts, the harder we will struggle to love all of humanity.

If I truly see Donald's humanity and Elon's humanity, then I cannot write them off as worthy of the way love moves and breathes. If I see their humanity, then I have to see their best possibilities. And if I see their best possibilities, then I have to be willing to use some of my energy to hold them accountable for the harm they are doing, not for retribution, but for repair. And repair is not necessarily about reconciliation, but is about stopping the harm in order to restore our shared humanity.

Now here is another place progressive Christians can lose the script—we can think repair means just letting something go. We can think turning the other cheek means letting people

continue the harm and just suck it up and take it. We can lose the power of Jesus' words here about turning the other cheek—being slapped in the face was about disrespect. Jesus is saying, don't foreground respect or honor, but foreground love that comes from a deep humility instead of reactivity. Being disrespected isn't the worst thing that can happen to a human being, being unloved is.

Repair is humanizing someone enough to think it matters to acknowledge the harm they did to you and creating boundaries that make them stop harming you. Turning the other cheek simply means setting the boundaries love sets not as a reaction, but as a response that runs deeper than societal norms and standards of respect or disrespect.

It doesn't mean you let them keep harming you; it means you acknowledge the harm and you say, I'm not going to let you keep doing this to me because I love you, not because you disrespected me.

It's a fine distinction, but so important in these very activating times. Jesus is calling us to come from a deeper aquifer than reactivity. Jesus is calling us to this true kind of love that begins inside of us when we know ourselves to be fully and completely loved.

So what could all of this mean for someone like the Donalds and the Elons—who have outsized power to do grotesque amounts of harm to multitudes of people. It means that love is what propels us to stop them from continuing the harm, not hate.

Hate is like the chaff, it is the emotion that has no foundation, no tap root. It burns out in a flash.

Love is the action word with the fuel source to really change things.

Now if this feels like something you really don't want to do or can't do, that makes sense. But Jesus still says it's what we need to do if we want to be free, if we want to heal, if we want to be in right relationship with God and with the world.

Love doesn't cower in the corner and let harm continue. Love doesn't put its head in the sand and hope it will all be over soon. Love does not coddle bullies or center the comfort of the powerful. Love does not write people off and say they aren't worth the energy it takes to hold them accountable. Love is the power to actually stop the harm and be ready for something new to unfold from that truth.

The Donalds and Elons of the world are not anomalies, they are products of American culture, of white supremacy culture. Donald is who he is because we are who we are.

America created him, elevated him, and gave him license to literally kill for his own twisted needs.

He is one of us. He is in the extreme role that the enemy within was authorized to take on when we withhold true love from anyone in the human family.

If this was a Christian nation, white supremacy would never have stood the test of time. It would have been stopped in its tracks way back in colonial Maryland when white male landowners came up with a great plan for dividing the workforce based on race and whiteness was born so that they could hoard resources.

If Christians had been following Jesus, love wouldn't have gotten lost in the list of priorities. Love got replaced with wealth—the love of money is what got us here, America. And we're not going to heal as a nation until we heal that wound, that idolatry, that lost part of us that thinks we can buy our peace or our prosperity and our happiness and our comfort.

Love is willing to lose what's causing the harm. Love is willing to have less, to reclaim our shared humanity.

At many turns, America has made a different choice about what's important collectively. We do it again and again, we say it's about the economy—but it's not about God's economy, it's about the extractive economy and hoarding resources no matter who gets hurt in the process. It's about slicing and dicing up communities so that we don't really know each other. It's about not really loving ourselves, but covering up our self loathing with nice things and the appearance of being fine, and with the falseness of store-bought agency.

Our true agency as human beings lives in these words of Jesus—love your enemies. That is where our power lies. In these horrifying times in America, hate is not going to get us where we need to go. Love is the only thing that can really get us to the promised land where humans are not pitted against each other with such murderous consequences.

But enough of this distorted love, this short cut love that we bring out before it's time. Enough of this watered down love that really isn't for everyone. Enough of this love that is conditional, this love that only does the work when it is doesn't rock the boat. Enough of this false love that says we have to be nice and not do the hard work that love demands.

If you have not befriended and learned to love the enemy, the exile within yourself, then you will continue to be repulsed and repelled by the enemy you see outside of you.

These times call us to not avoid the hard work, but to dig even deeper into what this work calls us to be and to do together. We need to practice this together every day! We will not stop using the word equity. We will not stop practicing equity in how we are church. That means we are finding ways together for everyone to get what they need. We will not stop disrupting the murderous mentalities of supremacy and greed and violence and abusive power.

Love your enemies enough to make them stop hurting you and others. Love your enemies enough to believe they deserve accountability, they deserve us reflecting back to them how the harm they are doing is impacting the human family. Collectively, we have the power to let love speak and act and change the world and change us.

Do good to those who harm you. Stop the harm and give them the gift of the truth of the impact of their actions. Give them the gift of their humanity. They deserve to be seen as worth the fight for us all to someday, someday be free.

Thanks be to God.