

Daily Discipleship

Seventh Sunday after Epiphany (C) – Luke 6:27-38

Imperatives of Discipleship – *Love your Enemy!*

Focus Question: *What does it mean to love our enemy?*

word of life

“But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.” (Luke 6:27 NRSV)

Read Luke 6:27-38

In the Gospel of Luke, prayer is the center of the life of Jesus. In chapter six, Luke describes Jesus ascending to the top of the mountain to pray. In fact, he spends the whole night in prayer to God. On the next day, Jesus calls his disciples together and chooses twelve to be his apostles.

Then Jesus descends the mountain and stands on level ground with a crowd of his disciples from Judea, Jerusalem, Tyre, Sidon and many other places. They came to be healed of their diseases and troubles, trying to touch Jesus and receive some of his mighty, healing power.

Jesus heals, but he also teaches the crowd. This teaching on the plain is also found in the Gospel of Matthew, but is referred to as the Sermon on the Mount. Whether Jesus is on a level field or a mount, he begins with a series of blessings (beatitudes) followed by an invitation to listen to the heart of his message.

1. *Describe that scene on the plain as Jesus healed and taught.*
2. *If you attended that event, how would you have responded to Jesus and his teaching?*

Jesus wastes no time and gets to the heart of his teaching with these imperatives, “But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.” (Luke 6:27 NRSV) The list of imperatives also includes: Turn your cheek to those who hurt you, share your coat with those who steal from you, give to everyone who begs from to you and “Do to others as you would have them do to you.” (Luke 6:31 NRSV)

3. *Which of these imperatives is the most challenging for you? How so?*
4. *Why are the teachings of Jesus so challenging?*

Jesus knows it is easy to love those in our life who are likable and loveable. Anyone can do that. Instead, Jesus calls his followers to another standard—an impossible one at that. Jesus expects his followers to love their enemies and anticipate absolutely nothing in return. Jesus expects his followers to not judge and condemn, but to forgive. Jesus expects his followers to show mercy just as God has shown mercy to each of us.

It is no wonder that Jesus begins with the words, “But I say to you that listen...” Once followers hear these expectations, many stop listening. To follow Jesus is simply too difficult and radical. Who loves their enemy? Who does good to those who hate them? Who turns the other cheek? Who prays for those abuse you? Who forgives the enemy? Who shows mercy? Jesus does.

Jesus does not ask for anything which he does not embody. He is the standard. We are humbled by the expectations. Left to our limited human abilities, we cannot do as Jesus asks of us. His imperatives drive us to prayer to the One who empowers us. We can live out these expectations only by the grace of God.

5. *How would you describe these expectations?*

word *among us*

Who loves their enemy? Who does good to those who hate them?
Who turns the other cheek? Who prays for those who abuse them?
Who forgives the enemy? Who shows mercy?

Jesus does. Of course. Jesus loves, does good, turns the other cheek, prays for those who abuse him, forgives and shows mercy. Jesus is divine. And we most certainly are not.

1. *Should we be held by the same standard of Jesus?*
2. *Why might Jesus want us to live in such radical ways?*

Most would agree that the imperatives of Jesus run contrary to society and our own natural responses. In reality, there is a certain fire in the belly when we have a chance to embrace our righteous anger. That may be true as we fume at a traffic light, waiting for the car in front of us to move. There is a certain satisfaction as we harbor hurt feelings from childhood or feel resentment sparked by the words of a colleague, friend or family member. But that anger can also fester like an open wound.

When Jesus teaches about loving our enemies, he is not teaching a theory. Simply review the final week of his life. Jesus applies his teaching when he faces his enemies—those who abuse him, plot his death, and kill him. Consistently, Jesus turns the other cheek, does not retaliate, and does not judge. Despite it all, he loves. As he faces physical abuse and his own death, Jesus chooses another path.

3. *Describe how Jesus modeled his imperatives during the final week of his life.*

There is no doubt the love which Jesus expects from his followers is a divine love, born in prayer and gratitude. Our actions begin with a clear understanding of how God has already showed love, mercy, forgiveness, and grace to us. Our hope to live as Jesus is rooted in God's mighty and healing Spirit which has already begun to work in our lives, setting us on a path of transformation where there is no room for hatred, revenge, or judgement.

4. *What would our life be like without any hatred, revenge, or judgment?*
5. *What might take their place?*

Jesus does not expect us to live this radical life on our own, but gives the Holy Spirit to empower us with the strength and wisdom to face our challenges as well as other followers of Christ who encourage and remind us of this unique calling of divine love.

6. *How are we changed as we try to forgive and show mercy?*
7. *What role does prayer have in our life as we pursue the path of divine love?*

Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for holding us to such high standards. To be honest, sometimes we don't want to love our enemies and do good to those who hate us. We confess our shortcomings to you. Shape and mold us in the image of Christ. Amen

Dig Deeper

Matthew 5:43-48



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Written by Robin McCullough-Bade

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last word

This week be intentional about praying for your enemies—both near and far.