

The 7th Sunday after Epiphany: Holy Trinity Church: February 14, 2019

Luke 6: 27-38: Can we love like Jesus loved?

Preached

By

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In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Actor James Dean once said, “Live fast, die young and leave a good looking corpse. If I were to ask you your philosophy of life, could you tell it to me?”

Our philosophy of life comes out of us in subtle ways: the attitude we wake up with in the morning, how we treat other people, how we approach a new situation, the things we spend our time, energy and money on. It’s worth taking a moment to examine our life philosophy because, in many ways, it creates our legacy. That’s why we need a dependable philosophy for our lives. With a reliable philosophy of life we can program our life with a set of beliefs, values and priorities that will guide us to our destination and the best source of that philosophy is Jesus Christ.

Jesus' entire philosophy of life was based on love. This is the important truth you simply cannot miss. When you base your life on principle, 99% of your decisions are already made. But let's change this just a little bit. In light of Jesus' teachings let's word it like this: "When you base your life on love, 99% of your decisions are already made."

Do you see what Jesus is trying to do in today's Gospel from Luke? He is giving his listeners a new picture of what their lives should look like. In Luke chapter 6, verse 17 notes that Jesus was surrounded by a huge crowd. This crowd included Jewish citizens and members of the Jewish ruling class, the Pharisees. It also included folks from Tyre and Sidon, pagan cities that practiced Baal worship and Roman troops who exploited and oppressed the Jews. These folks were standing shoulder to shoulder with their enemies as Jesus spoke.

When Jesus said, "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you..." he was introducing them to a whole new way of looking at life. Jesus was saying to them, this is how things work in the Kingdom of God. Jesus' entire philosophy of life was rooted in love. I am constantly amazed how many Christians miss that truth. There's a reason for that, of course. Maybe we have never really listened to

the teachings of Jesus. Notice how Jesus begins this teaching: “But to you who are listening love your enemies.” I find that phrase to be very interesting.

Jesus said, “I say to you that listen.” Not everybody is listening, are they?

Earlier in Luke 6, verse 7 says that the Pharisees, the Jewish religious leaders, were watching Jesus, looking for some reason to trip him up and accuse him.

They weren’t really listening to him. Then we read in verse 19 that lots of people in the crowd were reaching out to touch Jesus because they had seen healing power flow from him, and they wanted to take some of that for themselves. Some of them weren’t really listening either. They just wanted him to fix their own situation.

In many ways, those people who lived over 2,000 years ago are not so different from many of us, are they? Some of us come to church on Sunday morning and sit in the pew and turn our minds off. We’re tired, or we’re thinking about what we are going to eat, or distracted, or angry, or we’re not even sure why we’re here. Whatever the reason, we’re not ready to listen to the Gospel. Because listening means we are open to learning something new. Listening means we are open to change.

Listening to God means being obedient to God. There is a word we don’t like, and that word is obedience. So, Jesus knew that only a few people may really

listen to his message. He knew most people aren't ready to have their life philosophy turned upside-down. But to those who are listening, he offers a philosophy of life that provides not only hope, but salvation as well.

A man who was working on a crossword puzzle asked his friends, "What's a four-letter word for a strong emotional reaction to difficulty?" One man responded "Fear." The other friend answered, "Love." If you think about it for a moment, those are the two words that generally define how we respond to life situations. We respond either with fear or love. Jesus' philosophy is based on love. Our Gospel reading today is an amazing passage of scripture. In this passage Jesus gives us a beautiful picture of what a life based on love looks like.

Now I know what many of you are thinking. Fr. John, you are a real dreamer. That's impossible! We can't live like that. It demands too much of us. Who can love their enemies? Who can do good to those who hate them? How can we pray for those who mistreat us? I mean, besides Jesus. He certainly did each of those things. But can we? Can we love like Jesus loved?

My sisters and brothers, I believe we can. Maybe not perfectly, after all, we are not Jesus. But, we ARE HIS disciples! We can do better than we are doing. Let me give you an example of what love can do.

In 1991, Michael and Julie Weisser, a Jewish couple, received their first telephone call from Larry Trapp, the Grand Dragon of the Nebraska Ku Klux Klan. Trapp took great joy in harassing Jewish people, immigrants and people of color. He made threatening phone calls, sent out hate mail, and encouraged his followers to commit vandalism and acts of violence against non-white or Jewish people. But Trapp made a big mistake when he picked on the Weissers. They decided to fight his hatred with love. Michael Weisser began leaving caring, friendly messages on Larry Trapp's answering machine. When the Weissers learned that Trapp was a blind, wheelchair-bound diabetic, they offered to run errands for him. Finally, the Weisser's continuous campaign of love paid off. Larry Trapp left the Ku Klux Klan and converted to Judaism. He gave the police and FBI valuable, insider information on local and national hate organizations. He also called every single person he'd ever harassed and apologized. But the Weissers went one step further. As Larry's diabetes worsened, the Weissers took him in and cared for him until his death. I believe the Weissers were listening to Jesus' message even though they are not Christians. Loving those who love you? As Jesus said, anybody can do that. That's for unbelievers. Loving somebody like Larry Trapp takes grace, the awesome, undeserved gift of love and mercy that

God has given us. If a Jewish couple can love like that, cannot we who say we are disciples of Jesus Christ improve our witness of love?

We live in a fear-based world of anger and hatred and vengeance. So, my brothers and sisters, how do we find our way out? Where do we start? I know it sounds simplistic, but it is also true. Our only hope is the love of Jesus Christ. In the First Letter of John 3: 14, the apostle and evangelist says, “*We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death.*” Fear and hate and unforgiving leads to retaliation, revenge, isolation and even war. They are all one-way streets that lead to spiritual and sometimes actual death. Choosing love over hate frees us from our ego and our fear and our pride. It frees us to be a force for life instead of death.

You and I know well the situation in the world today. Do you really see any other hope for the world than the love of Jesus Christ which will be revealed to all people? Here is Jesus’ challenge for all of us this week. I want you to think about the loving way. Love isn’t how you feel. Love is what you do. Loving our enemies, doing good to those who hate us, praying for those who speak evil of us, forgiving those who mistreat us frees us from the downward spiral of hate. Get rid of all bitterness. Get rid of that rage and anger. Get rid

of that brawling and slander and gossip. Get rid of every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ, God forgave you. My sisters and brothers get rid of it all. Not just some; Get rid of it all even the tiniest grudges, not even a single crumb of bitterness or malice. If you don't get rid of it, it will grow into rage, anger, even separation and death. But there is a much better way. Show your friends, show your neighbors, show your co-workers, show your class mates and show everyone you meet the love of Jesus and let that love change the world.

That's it my sisters and brothers. That is the way of love that Jesus calls all of us disciples, you and me, to follow. Is it hard? You betcha! The way of love will be the hope for the world. Jesus knew not everyone was going to listen to his teaching. The kind of love, generosity and mercy that he expected from his followers, in the eyes of the world, it just doesn't make sense. It is risky business . Following Jesus is risky business. It's asking us to give up your rights and your pride and our comfort. And yet it's the most powerful way possible for us to show the world that we belong to Jesus Christ. Live your life in that loving way and you will truly represent Jesus. Live your life in that loving way and you will truly make a difference in the world and more importantly you will truly give hope to the world. AMEN