

Year C Epiphany 7 Put God's Love on Display Luke 6 27 to 38

This Gospel story is a continuation of Jesus' Sermon on the Plain that we began last week. So, before we talk about the Gospel story we heard today, it is important for us to recall a couple of things from last week's story.

Jesus has just come down from the mountain after spending the night in prayer with God. Jesus brings this close relationship with God down among the people – on a level place – and this multitude of people witness an astounding display of glory and power: the power went out from him and healed all of them, Luke tells us. Luke is making sure that we get the message – Jesus is God's Son, the Messiah. Jesus has all of the power and authority of God.

After we are absolutely clear on this – and only after this – Luke shares with us the very difficult teachings of Jesus the Christ that flip the world on its head, teachings that go against what the people believed about God and about how the world works.

Jesus informs them that being blessed by God does not mean life will be all sunshine and roses. The rich people who have turned their backs on God but are prospering, well, the world's power and glory is all they will ever get. Life in God's kingdom, Jesus says to them, is for those you think are being rejected and punished by God – the marginalized and the vulnerable – who are faithful to God – they are in the kingdom.

After all of this jaw-dropping teaching, Jesus says to the crowd today, "For those of you who are still listening to me, for those of you who haven't walked off thinking I'm 'loony tunes,' I have more eye-popping things to teach you about God's kingdom."

And boy, does he ever start with a whammy: Love your enemies, he tells them. Talk about flipping their world upside-down. Love your enemies. And you can't just think to yourself, "Okay, I love my enemies...there, done." No way...that's not good enough. You can't just think about it. You must do it: do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who abuse you. Put your

love on display, Jesus tells them. Not for the people you're "good with," he says. That's too easy.

My teaching is radical, he tells them. It's all in the attitude. Love without expecting love in return. Give without expecting anything in return. This is why, later on in Luke's Gospel when he tells the story of the Good Samaritan, the hero of the story – the supposedly 'rejected by God, looked down upon as scum Samaritan' – saves a Jewish person in need...a Jewish person who holds the widespread belief that this Samaritan is rejected by God and looks down on him as scum. This "Good Samaritan" does not leave his name and number with the innkeeper so that the Jewish person can pay him back when he is well enough or even so that this Jewish person can profusely express his immense gratitude. The Samaritan leaves abundant money to care for an enemy, choosing to put his love on display.

What is Jesus' point with all of this topsy-turvy teaching about love? Those who follow God's ways will simply be this way and do these things because they follow God's ways. Loving abundantly will be a part of who they are in their innermost being.

They will lend to those who cannot pay them back. They will say hello to the one who gives them the silent treatment. They will shovel the driveway of the cranky neighbour who yelled at them for walking on his grass last summer. They will be merciful as God is merciful. They will not condemn because that's God's job. They will not judge others because that's God's job. But, wait a minute, hang on...Jesus has gone too far here. These ones are too tough for us.

Don't judge anyone? Don't condemn anyone? Are you serious? That's what we do...constantly. Perhaps we try not to. But, truth be told, this is a very human failing and, since we are human, we fail. I saw a sign at the trucker protest in Windsor that said, "In God we trust...and the rest of you are going to Hell." Talk about taking over God's role as judge. Now, that's a big example on the national political stage but there are also plenty of examples closer to home, within our good Christian selves and within our good Christian neighbours. We've all done it. This is why, in John's Gospel, when a woman caught in the act of adultery was

brought before Jesus for him to judge her and condemn her to be stoned to death, he said to the crowd, "Let the person without sin throw the first stone. No one picked up a stone. Jesus knows that not one of here would be able to pick up a stone either. As Paul tells us, every one of us has sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Yet, we do pick up stones. We pick up stones and we hurl them. Hurtful words that are said. Hurtful words that are thought. Actions that proclaim loud and clear, "I am judging you and you have been condemned." Oh yes, we throw stones.

This is why, with great relief, we notice that Jesus does not pick up a stone either. Jesus, the only human being without sin, does not cast a stone at the sinful woman. We would all be stoned to death – or at least badly bruised – if Jesus were to cast stones at us sinners but Jesus tells us today that God forgives. Hallelujah. God forgives but...*we* must forgive as *God* forgives.

Jesus knows we judge others. We condemn others. We do not treat others the way we would want to be treated. We confess these things and other shortcomings every single week in our liturgy and every single week we are forgiven. We live in God's forgiveness and Jesus, in no uncertain terms, tells us today that we must be like that as well: to forgive as God forgives, to be merciful as God is merciful, to love abundantly as God loves abundantly. The measure we give, Jesus says, is the measure we will get back.

So perhaps we are feeling a little concerned now with the measure we will get back. Jesus has set the bar really high – love as God loves, be merciful as God is merciful, forgive as God forgives. We can't do that, can we? Well, let's think back to the beginning of Luke's story...Jesus comes down from the mountain to a level place – to be with the people, to be in relationship with the people. And what does he do while in relationship with the people? The power came out of him, Luke tells us. The power came out of him and healed all of them, everyone who turned to him received his healing power. What does that have to do with us here today? We, too, are in relationship with Jesus. In the mystery of our baptism, Jesus came down from the mountain to be in relationship with us, giving to us the healing power of the Holy Spirit. Anointed and marked as Christ's own

forever, God gives us the gift of the healing power of Christ. A power to not only make *us* whole but to make the *world* whole.

Giving your other cheek to be slapped after the first one has been slapped and giving two coats when you've been told to give one does not mean that Christians are door mats for everyone else to step on. Jesus is instructing us to show to the world the subversiveness of God's love. It is a love that will transform the world. Jesus is not telling us to accept and tolerate abuse. He is telling us to go beyond our petty human instincts to retaliate in kind when we feel wounded. We will all feel wounded – again and again – because we live in a broken world surrounded by broken people just like us. We *will* all feel wounded. What we say, or what we do not say when we are wounded, what we do, or what we do not do when we are wounded, tells the world around us whether we are choosing to live in God's kingdom or not. And the world *is* watching us. Put your love on display, Jesus says today. Put your love on display.

Joseph, sold into slavery by his brothers, does not retaliate against them when he has the chance. He welcomes them into his home and cares for their needs. He chooses to put his love on display. Jesus, hanging bloody and bruised on the cross, does not retaliate. He says, "Father, forgive them, they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). He puts his love on display. A high bar indeed but one we are called to obtain. Baptized into his death and resurrection, clothed in Christ's righteousness, we are called to the cross to put love on display.

The power went out from him and healed all of them: The power within us, the power to heal, the power to transform. Let us choose to put love on display.