

*“Listen, love your enemies”*

Meditation on Luke 6:27-38

Nov. 6, 2016 (All Saint’s Day)

Merritt Island Presbyterian Church

*‘But I say to all who would listen, 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. If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But 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 he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; 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.’*

\*\*\*

Corrie ten Boom was the daughter of a watchmaker in Haarlem, Holland on Feb. 28, 1944 when the Gestapo raided her home. This is Corrie with her cats when she was young and what Haarlem looked like when she was growing up. Here is her home after it was restored as a museum after WWII. The Nazis arrested Corrie and 29 other family members and friends that day in 1944, some who had been attending a prayer meeting in her living room. She and her family belonged to the

Dutch Reformed Church. One of the essential tenets of their faith was the belief that all human beings were equal before God. Corrie and her family had many Jewish friends. Not long after the German invasion of the Netherlands, the ten Booms narrow, 3-story home became a place of refuge for Jewish people and members of the Dutch Resistance. The Ten Boom family and friends saved the lives of about 800 Jewish people and protected many Dutch underground workers by hiding them in a tiny, secret space behind a false wall in Corrie's bedroom.

On this day when we honor and give thanks to God for all the saints, I remember Corrie, who I have admired since I read her 1971 book, *The Hiding Place*, when I was a child. Corrie would be shocked that anyone would call her a "saint" or "hero of the faith" as some have said. She credited her family that nurtured her faith and showed her how to love and be generous with all people, no matter race or religion, rich or poor. The Ten Booms, who had very little money, fostered 11 children, along with caring for 5 children of their own.

When I first read *The Hiding Place*, I thought the title meant only the secret room. As an adult, I realized that Corrie's *Hiding Place* is also the Lord! She tells of her father reading Scripture every morning to the family. One morning, when she was about 6, he put on his rimless spectacles and began to read a "long, long psalm": "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path... Thou art *my hiding place* and my shield: I hope in thy word." Corrie wondered what kind of hiding place her Father was talking about, and, in her happy, secure world, "What was there to hide from?"

After the family's arrest in 1944, the Nazis released everyone but

Corrie, her older sister, Betsie, and 84-year-old Casper. He died 10 days later. The sisters remained in prison until June 1944, when officials transferred them to an internment camp in the Netherlands; three months later, the Nazis deported Corrie and Betsie to the Ravensbruck concentration camp in Germany. In the terrible environment of a death camp, the light of Christ shone through them. They shared their faith with other prisoners, many of whom became Christians. They stayed together until Betsie died in December 1944, after telling Corrie there was much work to be done for the Lord. Corrie left the camp knowing that her life was a gift from God, and that she needed to share what she and Betsie learned: that “there is no pit so deep that He is not deeper still” and “God will give us the love to be able to forgive our enemies.”

\*\*\*

God’s love for us and our calling to love others is the message of the gospel reading in Luke. This passage is part of Jesus’ “Sermon on the Plain,” which has some of the same teachings as the “Sermon on the Mount” in Matthew. Just before our reading, Jesus shares a vision of the Kingdom, a society that we can hardly imagine; it is so unlike our world today. Jesus preaches to a “great crowd of disciples” **and** a “great multitude of people” who have come to “hear him” and “be healed of their diseases” (v. 18). He reveals God’s power and mercy when he heals them ALL (v. 19)!

Christ’s message is revolutionary. He tells them that poverty and persecution are signs of God’s blessing and favor! “*Blessed are you who are poor,*” he says in v. 20, “*for yours is the kingdom of God.*” They had

been taught the opposite--that wealth is a sign of God's blessing or reward for obedience, as in Deut. 28: *"Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of your womb, the fruit of your ground, and the fruit of your livestock, both the increase of your cattle and the issue of your flock. Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading-bowl. Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out..."*

After Jesus shares His vision, he shares the expectations for the "children of the Most high." "But *Listen*," he begins, meaning *listen and obey*, *"Love your enemies."* This love is shown through actions and powered through prayer. *"Do good to those who hate you,"* he says, clarifying what he means by "enemies" as those who have a problem *with you*. In v. 35, Jesus repeats for emphasis, *"But love your enemies, do good and lend, expecting nothing in return."* Also in v. 35, we hear echoes of Genesis 1--when God creates humans in His image. The command here is to *be like God*. *"Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."* And if you weren't persuaded, yet, that our relationships with people affect our relationship with the Lord, you will be by v. 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. Give and it will be given to you..."*

\*\*\*

Friends, our relationships with people affect our relationship with the Lord! But to love our enemies isn't easy for us; as it certainly wasn't easy for the people hearing Christ's message long ago. We answer Christ's call to forgive and "do good," depending on the Lord for help.

We are powered by prayer. We can be inspired by other faithful Christians, who have endured great suffering yet pursue the divine vision for God's children--to love, give, and forgive.

After Corrie ten Boom was released from the death camp, she began a worldwide ministry at the age of 53, testifying to God's love and forgiveness, encouraging all she met with the message that Jesus is Victor. She emphasized the importance of prayer.

But Corrie struggled with loving her enemies and forgiving them, too. In a *Guideposts* article in 1972, Corrie recalls meeting a former guard from the concentration camp when she was speaking at a Munich church in 1947. She saw him and "it all came back in a rush..." she writes. "...Now he was in front of me, hand thrust out. 'A fine message, *fraulein!*' he said. 'How good it is to know that, as you say, all our sins are at the bottom of the sea!'"

She remembered him and the leather crop swinging from his belt. It was the first time since her release that she had been face to face with one of her captors and her "blood seemed to freeze." He told her that he had become a Christian since Ravensbruck. "I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from your lips as well. *Fraulein!*--again the hand came out--'will you forgive me?'"

"And I stood there,' she writes, 'I whose sins had every day to be forgiven--and could not. Betsie had died in that place. Could he erase her slow terrible death simply for the asking? ... I wrestled with the most difficult thing I had ever had to do. For I had to do it--I knew that. The message that God forgives has a prior condition: that we forgive those

who have injured us. ...And still I stood there with the coldness clutching my heart. But forgiveness is not an emotion....it is an act of will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart.

“‘Jesus, help me,’ I prayed silently....’ (Then) Woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And ... an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes.

“I forgive you, brother!” I cried. “With all my heart!”

“...For a long moment we grasped each other’s hands, the former guard and the former prisoner. I have never known God’s love so intensely as I did then.”

Here are some of my favorite Corrie quotes: “Is prayer your steering wheel or flat tire?” “It is not my ability but my response to God’s ability that counts.” “Don’t bother to give God instructions. Just report for duty.” “Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God.” “Worry doesn’t empty tomorrow of it’s sorrow; it empties today of its strength.” “Joy runs deeper than despair.” “If you don’t like your lot in life, build a service station on it.” “When he tells us to love our enemies, he gives, along with the command, the love itself.”

### **Let us pray.**

Lord God, thank you for your love and your forgiveness! Give us your vision for the Kingdom and help us to live as you call us to live. Thank you that we can seek your help to mend relationships broken by our

own stubbornness, selfishness, carelessness or pride. Forgive us, Lord, for not treating others with the same love, mercy and grace that you show us. Forgive us for judging and holding grudges. Empower us to listen to your Word and do your will--to love our enemies and do good. Help us to inspire others with our faithfulness and to always seek you in prayer! In Christ's name we pray. Amen.