

Love Like the One You Serve

02/20/2022 - Based on Luke 6:27-38 and Psalm 37:1-11, 39

Good morning and Happy Sunday to you each. I am Darci Strutt McQuiston, one of the Lay Speakers within this congregation and it is my joy to be with you this morning.

The gospel lesson from Luke assigned for today has some tough parts to it so I decided to throw in a ukulele song I wrote based on the passage to ease into the end of my message.

This passage in Luke is a continuation of the sermon on the plain that Rev Dawn began last week. In the first section of Jesus sermon, he shared there is a blessing to having some terrible things happen to you. To be poor, hungry, sad, and hated doesn't sound like something to rejoice over. Being rich, full, laughing, and spoken well of was stated as a negative. He was tipping our idea of good and bad on its end.

This second part of the sermon on the plain has a hard message as well. Love your enemies. That sounds all well and good for Sunday school but a bit harder to do when faced with our real world.

I'm going to reread this passage of scripture from Luke in chunks as I attempt to break it down.

Luke 6:27-30

27 This is what I say to all who will listen to me:

Love your enemies, and be good to everyone who hates you. 28 Ask God to bless anyone who curses you, and pray for everyone who is cruel to you. 29 If someone slaps you on one cheek, don't stop that person from slapping you on the other cheek. If someone wants to take your coat, don't try to keep back your shirt. 30 Give to everyone who asks and don't ask people to return what they have taken from you.

I'd much rather follow "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." At the very least I like the idea of Karma and the thought that if someone wrongs me, they will get pain in their life as a payback. That would not be equal to asking God to bless them or to pray for them. Unless I'm praying for pain to catch up to them. I find myself arguing about this command not being fair.

Jesus is not condoning abuse. God cares about justice. Last week we learned that the joys and the terrors seemed reversed from our worldly view, and I think this week is to make us rethink our worldly view about who deserves love. In my working world these verses would have been called "stretch goals". They are nearly beyond our power, but we need to strive for them.

As I was mulling over these verses an image came to me.

I raised three children. Parenting is not for cowards. There were times I was there to deal with every argument and be the needed judge between them. There were other times I was not there when squabbles happened. My expectation was that they would attempt to resolve their disagreement but if punishment was needed it wasn't their place to act as judge over each other. That role was still mine even if they had to wait for it. Children do not have the maturity to see the complete picture separate from their emotions.

Growing up, many people my age literally heard the phrase, "Wait until your father gets home" when mom caught us in misbehavior. Dad was the one who dealt with judging the appropriate punishment.

This image came to mind probably because Jesus used the name of God that indicated our relationship. Jesus called him our Father. We are God's children. We also don't have the maturity to see the complete picture even though we

think we do! I can hear my voice yelling at my kids to be nice or be kind. I wonder if God wants to yell at me that way.

We call our brothers and sisters names and do harm sometimes bringing God's name into it as if we're speaking for him. Can you imagine the pain of a child when told by his older siblings, the ones that should know, that his father doesn't love him, or he'll never be loved because of who he is? We call that abuse when it happens to children, yet we've seen it in our past and present between God's children.

God is faithful in loving us. God doesn't treat us as we deserve. He doesn't write us off as we make mistakes. God patiently restates his teaching about how important it is to love one another for the billionth time. Loving one another isn't for the benefit of the other person. It is for our spiritual growth.

True love doesn't worry about equality. We humans however worry a lot about it.

Luke 6:32-34

32 If you love only someone who loves you, will God praise you for that? Even sinners love people who love them. 33 If you are kind only to someone who is kind to you, will God be pleased with you for that? Even sinners are kind to people who are kind to them. 34 If you lend money only to someone you think will pay you back, will God be pleased with you for that? Even sinners lend to sinners because they think they will get it all back.

This message feels like it has a lot of clichés in it already but here's another. "I'll scratch your back if you scratch mine." Sometimes it is simple things. We send out a birthday card and expect one on our birthday. Sometimes we pick up the meal tab when dining with a friend trusting they will pick it up next time. To be fair the scales need to stay even.

Jesus is telling us we shouldn't feel the need to be honored for that behavior. We are called to "BE" love. That includes giving without thought of receiving. Give because you see a need. Be kind because that is the type of person you are. Lend to another because you can help and recognize that ability comes from God so don't be stingy.

I'm going to offer you a personal example of this type of love in action. I am in a season of my life that is hard. In January my husband McQ became sick. He may be getting closer to the end of his journey with Alzheimer's, so any illness causes me great stress. My health also suffered, whether it was emotionally caused or because of a virus. There were days I didn't want to get out of bed I felt so exhausted. A church friend decided to pick up the Wednesday night meal and drop it off at my house. She's done it for a month. My journey with McQ has been draining and I don't know when I'm going to be able to make it up to her. I have the strong feeling she is loving like these verses and doesn't expect me to equalize things. She may trust I'll pay it forward to someone else when I can, but I don't even think that is a requirement attached. She felt it was something that could help me and so she did it. It is humbling to be on the receiving end of such love. God's love, given with human hands.

God does not forget those that obey his law of love.

Luke 6:35-36

35 But love your enemies and be good to them. Lend without expecting to be paid back. Then you will get a great reward, and you will be the true children of God in heaven. He is good even to people who are unthankful and cruel. 36 Have pity on others, just as your Father has pity on you.

We need God's mercy and pity for our human state. We have moments of failing to treat others like we want to be treated. We depend on grace.

We honestly shouldn't want love to be fair. That would mean we'd get what we deserve. We deserve death. Without Jesus giving his life to save ours we would get death.

The sermon continues with the need to let God do the judging.

Luke 6:37

37 Jesus said:

Don't judge others, and God won't judge you. Don't be hard on others, and God won't be hard on you. Forgive others, and God will forgive you.

This passage makes it feel a little more equal but still quite hard to do. Its hard to remember that we are not so great ourselves. The saying "people living in glass houses should not throw stones" was used a lot when I was young. It was a reminder that my behavior needs forgiveness as much as the person I was currently complaining about.

There is a big difference between justice and judging someone. We are called to come to the aide of people who are being mistreated. In my analogy of my kids fighting, I did expect one of them to step in if there was danger of physical harm. That is not judging and that is not dispensing justice. It is caring for each other.

Judging is holding a negative opinion of someone for who they are or what they do. Maybe they are making different mistakes that we think are worse than the mistakes that we are making. This sort of judging is more like prejudice. We feel the person is unworthy because of who they are. Because they are different than us, we need them to be wrong, so we feel secure we are right.

I'm going to sneak in a couple more lines of scripture that weren't in the original reading.

Luke 6:41-42

41 You can see the speck in your friend's eye. But you don't notice the log in your own eye. 42 How can you say, "My friend, let me take the speck out of your eye," when you don't see the log in your own eye? You show-offs! First, get the log out of your own eye. Then you can see how to take the speck out of your friend's eye.

Who are we to judge? We are not without sin. We are not perfect.

We are reminded that we all have much to learn before we can love the way God loves. Loving this way is our calling. We are all struggling to reach the level of love Jesus demonstrated. We all fail in different ways. Comparing how well we're doing between each other is like the old joke asking, "What's the difference between murder and stealing in hell?" The punchline is, "around 60 degrees." It is dark humor but a reminder that without God's mercy and compassion we are all in trouble. It doesn't matter how little or how much we fail. We fail. We depend on God's grace. Our brother and our enemy depend on God's grace alongside of us.

Love is unfairly given to us. We get much more love and forgiveness than we deserve. Jesus asks us to not expect equality as we give love. Love extravagantly without thought of return from the individual you share it with.

The relationship between you and your brother isn't the measure to focus on. The relationship between you and God is what is shown in what you give away. Can we trust God, or do we think we need to do life on our own?

This is the part of the sermon I really need to hear. Feel free to listen in if it helps you too.

I may appear on the outside to have my life together, but fear has a strong hold on me and trust wavers. It is easy for me to understand that we can't expect humans to keep things equal. Humans always want to end up on top. Humans are greedy and self-centered much of the time. These verses don't dispute that and have my full agreement. Like the Bible verses that say we are going to see trouble and suffering in this world. I can get behind those words because I see them in action.

The part of I need to pray hard about is Luke 6:38.

Luke 6:38 If you give to others, you will be given a full amount in return. It will be packed down, shaken together, and spilling over into your lap. The way you treat others is the way you will be treated.

I can only imagine giving without thought of receiving from other humans if I believe this verse. Otherwise, my life will be drained, and I will be left with dreams of a heavenly home since earthly existence would be impossible. You can't continue to give without receiving from somewhere.

I mentioned earlier that my husband has Alzheimer's. His care became more than I could do while holding down a job. I left paid employment in 2017 to become his fulltime caregiver. His pension and social security combined with our IRA kept us comfortable and our financial advisor said we'd be okay. Then his care became more than one person could handle and we added rent, high rent, very high rent, to our expenses. My life is still dedicated to him, calls come in any time of day or night, so getting a paid position outside the home would require great flexibility as well as different strategies for handling stress. The IRA is shrinking. Our financial advisor no longer thinks we'll be okay. Red warning lights are going off.

I did what any person trained in checkbook management would do. I cut expenses. I need to depend on myself and figure this out. Cable has been cut. It wasn't worth the cost. I canceled as many non-necessary expenses as I could see. COVID helped my entertainment expenses drop to near zero. I also cut a lot of my giving. I only feel partially guilty because I have no income currently and more than tithe my time to the church.

Yet I read verses like this, and I sense God asking me the question, "Don't you trust me child?"

The Bible is a cool book to read. It only gets complex when you try to apply it to your life.

God has been working on me. It's no coincidence that my last Bible study was on "What Love Is". It's also poetic that I wrote the epistle for Valentine's Day. A day that is hard with my husband unwell. God pushed me to understand that the love between God and I was what I needed to focus on.

We picked the hymns for this Sunday before I knew I was preaching. Our final hymn, "Great Is Thy Faithfulness" is what I need to be singing as we end this service. Our first hymn was also appreciated.

Matthew reminds us:

Matthew 10:29-31

29 Aren't two sparrows sold for only a penny? But your Father knows when any one of them falls to the ground. 30 Even the hairs on your head are counted. 31 So don't be afraid! You are worth much more than many sparrows.

His eye is on the sparrow, and he is faithful to care for us too. We love as an act of obedience to God. We love each other because God our Father said so. We can trust God will care for us as we obey.

I believe earth is a classroom, and love is our highest lesson. If you read my epistle on Monday, you may remember that I'm learning that obedience to God is how we show God, we love him. Christ said the greatest command was to love God and love each other. That should be clear enough, but we seem to need more examples. Today's lesson from Luke is one such example.

Jesus' message is about love. Love your friends sure, but that's not hard. Love the people you don't like. Love the people that are even mean and demanding. Love the people who you think don't deserve love. Because guess what, that's how God loves. You aren't loving them for their benefit. You are loving them because that is being obedient to God. The relationship to care about is the one between you and God.

We can trust God. We must trust God. I will keep praying until that becomes firm. We love because he first loved us. Jesus is our best example of that love. Remember this lesson as we go into lent. Love isn't fair. Praise God for that!

Pray for the Holy Spirit to help you to love like God loves. I'm pretty sure we humans can't get this hard work done without help so pray often. The lesson here isn't about our enemy getting away with bad behavior. It is about us being taught how to trust God, and love as he loves.

<song>

Amen

Love Like the One You Serve

Based on Luke 6:27-38 - Words and music by Darci Strutt

Verse 1:

Dear Lord did you see just how poor he's treated me
You want me to love I just want to push and shove

Pre chorus:

My child you're looking the wrong way
When you focus on your enemy
The relationship to care about
Is the one between you and me

Chorus:

Give without thought of receiving
Love though that's not what they deserve
Remember how I first loved you
And love like the one you serve

Verse 2:

Dear Lord did you see all the things he stole from me
You want me to ignore and when he asks to give him more

Pre chorus

Chorus

Bridge:

It's not easy to love
Like my Father from above
But because he first loved me
A loving child I'll try to be

Chorus