

7 S. after Epiphany 2/23/25
Luke 6:27-38 C

“BE MERCIFUL, EVEN AS YOUR FATHER IS MERCIFUL”

The season of Lent is only a few weeks away. So, I spent some time thinking about what to do for our midweek Lenten worship services. You will recall that several years ago, we focused on “The Hard Sayings of Jesus.” You guys seemed to like that one, so I briefly considered looking at “The Most Harder Sayings of Jesus,” because, honestly, Jesus said a lot of things we just don’t want to hear. Take His words to us today,

“But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them ... Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.”

So I ask you: How are you doing with that? In your life? The thoughts and desires of your heart? Have you just ignored, turned a deaf ear to these words of Jesus? This is a hard saying of Jesus. It’s hard thing to do because we don’t want to do it.

We’re more like old Miss Havisham than we care to admit. Miss Havisham is a character in Charles Dickens’ novel, “Great Expectations” and the picture of resentment, bitterness, keeping a record of wrongs. She was jilted at the altar many years before. That fateful day, she was dressing for her wedding, waiting for the hour of nine when her groom would arrive and the blessed event would begin. The immense wedding cake, along with a sumptuous feast, lay in wait. At precisely ten minutes before nine, a message arrived. The groom would not be coming; he had

run away with another woman. At that moment, time ceased to move forward in the mansion of Miss Havisham. Every clock in the house was set to ten minutes to nine from that day on. Neither did old Miss Havisham's wardrobe ever change: she still wore the wedding dress and the veil, now faded, yellowed with age and tattered. The windows of the ruined mansion stayed heavily draped so that sunshine would never enter. For decades, the cake and the feast had rotted on the tables, mostly carried off by rats and spiders. And she spoke her famous line, "Sharper teeth than those of the rats have been gnawing on me." And quite sadly, she was right. The teeth of resentment cut sharp and deep, and lay waste to the life that God designed as a feast and a celebration of abundant living.

Resentment, bitterness, wrath -- that's the natural reaction to being hurt. Keep a good, solid record of wrongs. Live in, dwell it, feel sorry for yourself. *"Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you."* Nope, Nope, and nope! No way; not going to happen.

That's our natural reaction. Sin divides. Sin divides us from God and sin divides us from one another. But even more than dividing, **sin hurts**. You know that all too well, don't you, Dear Child of God? None of us is immune from the pain – the spiritual, emotional, physical pain – that sin causes.

You have confessed once again that you have sinned against God in your thoughts, words, and deeds; that you deserve only God's temporal and eternal punishment, yet what does God do with sin? You know I love to ask you that question: WHAT DOES GOD DO WITH SIN? The answer: He **forgives** it – not because you are really, really, really sorry; not because you

have done enough “good” things to make up for the bad – as if that was even possible – no, God forgives you your sin for the sake of Christ, because of the life and death of Jesus.

Look at those words of Jesus, *“Love your enemies.”* The Bible says this, *“God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son”* (Jn 3:16). Even when you hated God’s will and were His enemy, God showed His love for you by sending His only-begotten Son to be born of Virgin Mother, to take on human flesh so that He could take on all your sin and pay all its wages of death.

“Do good to those who hate you.” The Apostle John tells us, *He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him* (Jn 1:11). Jesus returns to teach in the synagogue in His hometown of Nazareth, and the people welcome the Messiah with the disdainful words, *“Is not this Joseph’s son”* (Lk 4:22)? And they took Him to the brow of a hill, to throw Him down the cliff. There He is, in untold agony on the cross, and He is mocked, *“If you are the Son of God come down from the cross”* (Mt 27:40). *He trusts in God, let God deliver Him now, if He desires Him”* (Mt 27:43). *“He saved others; let Him save Himself, if He is the Christ of God”* (Lk 23:35). There Jesus is, doing good even to those who hate Him, as He is beaten, crowned with thorns, nailed to the cross for the salvation of the world.

“Bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.” And, Jesus does love those who curse and abuse you. *“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do,”* and He dies for those who curse and abuse Him (Lk 23:34).

ii. The GOOD NEWS of the Christian faith is that God does not pay sin with evil. Even though we deserve only God’s temporal and eternal

punishment, God does not treat us as our sins deserve. He repays sin with Jesus and the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin.

III. In the new birth of your Baptism, you were forgiven all your sin and raised a new creation in Christ, so that you can be a little Christ to your neighbor, even that neighbor who hurt you, grieved you, offended you, embittered your life. You can be merciful even to “that” neighbor, because God is merciful to you in Christ Jesus.

Some of life's hurts are so deep and painful that to forgive the people who caused them seems impossible. Yet, we dwell in Jesus and Jesus dwells in us, so that He can be merciful, as God is merciful to us.

Corrie Ten Boom is a living witness to that. After the Nazis invaded the Netherlands, she and her family began hiding Jews in their home. Betrayed in early 1944, the entire family was arrested. Ten days later, her father died in prison. She and her sister were sent to a concentration camp, where her sister died a slow, terrible death.

In 1947, Corrie spoke about God's forgiveness to a church in Munich. Afterward, a man sought her out. She recognized him as one of the guards who had mistreated her and Betsie. He told her that he had become a Christian and, with extended hand, he asked for her forgiveness. Corrie struggled with her feelings, but knew she needed to forgive as God had forgiven her. She silently prayed, "Jesus, help me!" and thrust her hand into the hand of her former tormentor.

MI: Whenever in the Bible Jesus commands us to do something, He gives us the ability and strength to do as He commands. ILL: Lazarus. He says, *“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you...be merciful, even as your Father is merciful”* and He gives us the strength, the ability, the desire, to be

merciful to your neighbor, even as your Father is merciful to you, Dear Child of God.

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