

Text: Luke 6:27-38

²⁷ “But I say to you who are listening: Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. ²⁸ Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who mistreat you. ²⁹ If someone strikes you on one cheek, offer the other too. If someone takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt. ³⁰ Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes away your things, do not demand them back.

³¹ “Treat others just as you would want them to treat you. ³² If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? To be sure, even the sinners love those who love them. ³³ And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? Even the sinners do the same thing. ³⁴ If you lend to those from whom you expect to be repaid, what credit is that to you? Even the sinners lend to sinners in order to be paid back in full. ³⁵ Instead, love your enemies, do good and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the unthankful and the evil. ³⁶ Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

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. ³⁸ Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be poured into your lap. In fact, the measure with which you measure will be measured back to you.” – EHV

Prayer of the Day:

Lord God, in mercy receive the prayers of your people. Grant them the wisdom to know the things that please you and the grace and power always to accomplish them; through Jesus Christ, your son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Verse of the Day:

Alleluia. Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Alleluia. (John 6:68)

Sermon Text:

The Golden Rule: “*Treat others as you would want to be treated.*” Repeated the world over and across generations, it has been said that this one concept appears in some form or another in almost every ideology in our world today. However, as is almost always the case, in order to feel like we have kept this or the other commands of God, we have watered it down. Love your spouse, your kids, your friends, even the stranger but hey, if we are honest, we’re getting a little cautious already with our love right? But what does Jesus say today? *Do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. ²⁹ If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. ³⁰ Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. ³¹ Do to others as you would have them do to you.* Sound like something you are ready to dive right in and do? Today Jesus cranks things up several notches and challenges us to **LOVE YOUR ENEMIES!**

Obviously, these words of our Savior before us today, well, they are **EASIER SAID THAN DONE**. Truth be told, these words of Jesus are considered by most to be among the most challenging and radical that He speaks. As a result, whenever we work through this section in Catechism classes you can expect a question or two. “Uh, Pastor, so are we supposed to just let people pummel us in this world, can’t we defend ourselves? We’re really just supposed to let people have anything of ours that they want? Won’t that just leave us poor and hungry?”

What those young men and women wrestle with, though they may not know it yet is the word love and the question of how one best shows it in each and every situation. *Love*, Paul tells the Romans, “*is the fulfillment of the Law.*” (Romans 13:10) Do it perfectly and you will be perfect as well. So, Jesus intentionally picks out challenging situations and asks us to wrestle with them.

Yes, you have a right to defend yourself. In fact, it is a responsibility given us in the 5th commandment to make sure that we respect the gift of life that God has given but do we love our neighbor enough, even when they should treat us as an enemy, to forgive such an evil turning even our other cheek to them should it be needed for their eternal good? It should be noted here that from time to time throughout history, passive resistance has changed hearts and minds while violence often only begets more violence. And of course, stealing is condemned in the Seventh commandment, but can we love enough to see past the offence and the lack of respect given to us to not only forgive but to seek to address the needs of the other, to set ourselves, our possessions, yes, our own personal gain aside in order to help someone else even if it will not get noticed, praised, or repaid?

Of course then there is the whole example of judgment. We have to talk about this one so much because it is often seen as the great hypocrisy of Christianity. Are we supposed to stop all forms of church discipline, which ultimately seek to assist the Christian break destructive cycles of sin in their lives and in the lives of others, as people so often seek to use these words? Or are we supposed to be able to look past what another has done to seek to love them, really love them in return. If you see someone, whom the past has told you, is not going to receive the truth of God’s Word, His Law, well, will you uncharitably judge that person to be hopeless and beyond help and leave them to walk away in their condemnation or will you forgive their past patterns and offenses and extend your hand to bless them. Yes, pointing out the sin they are trapped in always in the hope that they will leave their sinful life and listen to their loving God as Jesus points out in Matthew chapter 18?

As I considered all of this this week I came across an interesting quote from Eliezer Wiesel was a Romanian-born American Jewish writer, professor, political activist, Nobel Laureate, and Holocaust survivor. “The opposite of love is not hate, it's indifference. The opposite of art is not ugliness, it's indifference. The opposite of faith is not heresy, it's indifference. And the opposite of life is not death, it's indifference.” Isn’t it interesting that as many come to this section of scripture the end result is that we not hate our enemies but treat them with indifference. If we’re honest, if I’m honest, I’m comfortable with that but Jesus words make my sinful nature cringe.

No wonder so many have looked at this section as challenging, radical, yes, impossible to keep. Of course that is what the law has always been for sinful human beings. To love perfectly, even our friends and family would have been difficult enough. To put ourselves out for enemies, well, more and more today the Christian is greeted with adversity. How are you reacting to it? Love isn’t always the first thing that I go to in my mind as I contemplate it.

Yet, we dare not just dismiss these words of our God as is so often done in post-modernism either. “I can’t do this anyway, so I just won’t think about it.” I’ll just go comfortably numb to it all, to the world around me and to the Word of God that asks for more than that. No, this is a real expectation of our God. In fact, Jesus doubles down on all of this. ³² *“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ love those who love them. ³³ And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ do that. ³⁴ And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ lend to ‘sinners,’ expecting to be repaid in full. ³⁵ But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. ³⁶ Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.*

Yes, these words seem impossible, are impossible for us. But then we notice something. While they are impossible for us, they are not impossible for our God. He is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. He is merciful! This of course is exactly what we need. While I can’t keep the law perfectly, while I have often been found in the enemy camp instead of living a life of perfect love, God comes to the rescue.

Paul reminds the Colossians of what they were. ²¹ *Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. ²² But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation (Colossians 1:21-22).* He says it just a bit differently to the Romans *God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).*

God, who knows all things, knew in our sinfulness the world would not receive His Son. We treat Him as enemy with every sin. Yet, He doesn’t walk away from us, even though it would not have been the uncharitable judging He condemns if He had. No in pure mercy and grace, He allows Himself to endure far more than blows to His face. He endures the very punishment we deserve. He shows us the very love, we so often refuse to show others. As He pays for our sin on the cross, He even prays for His enemies, asking His heavenly Father to forgive them (cf. Luke 23:34). Because of His work on your behalf, You are already a Son of the Most High and the great reward of heaven is already yours.

Something else occurs as well. For the Christian as the impossible begins to become a reality. As I focus on this love something odd occurs. *Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again (2 Corinthians 5:14-15).* Having seen God’s love lived for me, for us, I am free to live for Christ! More than that I am compelled to live for Him. Not in fear and dread for the punishment that will be mine if I don’t but in love for the One who so loved me. And so we dare to contemplate what the world would call challenging, radical, even fool-hardy and we seek to look like God, to look like love, even to our enemies. Amen!