

Sermon 24 February 2019
Genesis 45:3-11, 15; 1 Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-50; Luke 6:27-38

We pick up where we ended last week in the sixth chapter of Luke and Jesus' *Sermon on the Plain*. In last week's reading Jesus spoke of blessings and woes, of hope and dread—calling people to a place of humble community and trust in God. We recognized that even in his hardest sayings, Jesus always speaks in love—love for saint and sinner, love for the lost and love for the prideful, love for the kind and love for the cruel. Jesus does not excuse evil, but he refuses to be drawn into the endless cycle of anger, hatred and retribution.

Last week we said, that when Jesus distinguishes “between right and wrong, between blessings and woes, he always does so under the umbrella of the Father's relentless, unwavering, steadfast love. Jesus does nothing outside the compass of God's love. All his teaching, all his life, his death and his resurrection, and all the work of the Holy Spirit through the centuries have been for this single purpose—that we learn *to love God with everything we have and everything we are, and to love our neighbors as we love ourselves.*”

In this morning's readings Jesus gets more specific. With an amazing economy of words he goes straight to the heart of our problem in community. We live too much of our lives poised to judge the actions and motives of others. Rather than pointing out and condemning the obvious, Jesus tells us what to do to remedy our affliction.

Love your enemies. Forgive.

Take the log out of your own eye so you can see clearly how to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye.

Judge not that you be not judged.

Jesus doesn't shake his righteous finger in our faces; he offers us his hand to help us step into a new place. He promises to be with us as we hope to change our ways and become more like God. Jesus is not merely another moral teacher. He does not teach and walk away. The story of his entire life and his guarantee of the gift of the Holy Spirit make it clear that he understands we cannot make the deep changes of

heart on our own. Our wills are not strong enough. He is with us to take our weak willingness and transform it into the strength of trusting faith.

Come to me, he says, and find rest for your souls.

Trust in me and in the love of God to never leave you.

I will give you strength.

I will transform your darkness into light.

With and in me you will know the satisfaction of being fully alive. You are God's beloved, and I am your friend.

With me you will realize and experience the desires of your heart.

I am with you always, even to the end of time.

This is why we call it *good news*.

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Read the passage again and notice Jesus' admonitions are held together by two phrases. They are the linchpins that hold the entire teaching together. They are the hard kernels of truth that help us understand the whole of what Jesus is saying.

Do to others as you would have them do to you. We have heard this *golden rule* since we were children. It is a truth explicitly taught in all the great religions of the world. If we are looking for a place to begin conversations with people of other faiths, this is the place to begin. Even those who say they have no faith, even agnostics and atheists, agree on the wisdom and goodness of the golden rule. We may be poor in living the rule, but we know it is true wisdom—and so we are wise to hold it as a lynchpin of our faith and an anchor of aspiration for the choices we make. This is how we are meant to live together.

The other lynchpin of the teaching turns our attention to God. *Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.* At the heart of our faith we know this is true. *God is merciful.* We have all known God's mercy personally, and we have seen God's mercy in the lives of others. Something *in* us wants this be true of us too. We want to be merciful. We want to live Godlike lives of mercy, forgiveness and love. And if we really want to, we can—again not in our own strength, but in communion with God, in companionship with Jesus, in the guiding care

of the Holy Spirit, and in the company of the beloved of God. We can all become intentional Christians; we can break free of old patterns of living and old attitudes and old values. We do it, in part, by being consistent in prayer and consistent in our *willingness* to be open to God's presence all the time.

Willingness, true committed willingness to change is all God asks of us. As we ask for understanding and wisdom, the Holy Spirit unites our willingness to change to a strengthening determination to act on the insights the Spirit gives us.

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Over 20 years ago I was standing in St. Peter's Cathedral in Vatican City. I was standing close to a tour group that was being led by a young priest. They were looking at one of the large paintings that line the cathedral walls. I heard the priest say to his attentive listeners, *"If you do not see why this painting is considered a masterpiece of art, you might be standing in the wrong place. Move a few steps to the right or left and see the light touch the painting in a different way."*

It is what we need to do. We need to step to a new place and look at life from a different angle. That is what we do when we begin the spiritual journey for real. We are moving from place to place when we follow Jesus, and the light touches us and our experiences in different ways. We see masterpieces where we used to see only the mundane, the flat and lifeless ordinary. As we journey in our faith we see things differently; the light reveals what we were blind to—the beauty and the sorrow, the needs and the blessings that surround us all the time. We used to walk by oblivious to most of what was around us, but now we see more and are poised to see even more.

Our faith in God steadily moves us to new places where we see old things in new ways, and new things we never dreamed existed. What a masterpiece is all creation! The galaxies spin out in incomprehensible elegance, the sun rises and sets in glory, the simple seed germinates into intricate and breathtaking simplicity, atoms and quarks do whatever they do wherever they are. Our souls and the souls of our companions suffer and rejoice, live and die and live again—and God expands the

tapestry of his artful design in endless ways of beauty. We don't want to be caught standing in the wrong place, and miss it altogether.

*Do to others as you would have them do to you.
Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.*

Maybe if I took a small step to the left or maybe to the right—maybe I would see this moment differently and share with God an experience of kindness and gentleness, forgiveness and new life, gratitude and joy, grace and love. Maybe I would begin to know the world as God knows it—and to know my fellow travelers—friend and enemy alike—as God knows them.

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At the end of last week's sermon I suggested some things we might do to help find our way to God's presence and peace, and onto the paths that lead us to being more fully alive. I suggested that you:

****Slow down.***
*****Make the time and find a place.***
******Trust and find silence,***
and listen for the still, small voice of God in your hearts—
simply listen.
*******Read the stories of Jesus—simply read and sit with them.***
********Ask God to give you the desires of your heart.***

This morning I add one more suggestion. Find a few scriptures that sing in your heart, scriptures that you will hold onto until your last breath. Find a few scriptures or scriptural truths that promise you what you need to believe to survive and grow and prosper in your soul. Let those scriptures be anchors for your life, lodestones of truth you hold to when everything else is falling away. Let the scriptures be promises to you personally, and let them be guideposts for the way you will live your life. You will find your own scriptures, but here are some of mine.

*Trust in the Lord and do good.
Dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.
Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you*

the desires of your heart. (Psalm 37)

*Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. (Psalm 23)*

*For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor
things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor
anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of
God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8)*

And remember, I am with you always. (Matthew 28)

I close with the same prayer I prayed last week. Pray with me.

Oh God, you are over all, in all, beyond all.

Open my eyes to see the wonders that surround me;

*open my heart to know the wonders of my
brothers and sisters;*

open my lips to sing your praise.

Restore all people in your image and likeness.

In and through Christ. Amen.

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(The following is the fuller version of the riff on page 4 above—from last
week's sermon.)

Slow down.

We live in too big a hurry. There is no way for us to find wisdom
in the pace of modern living. We will simply stay where we are,
ignorant of some of the most wonderful, terrible, and beautiful things in
our existence. There are two things that will slow us down—great love
and great suffering (Richard Rohr). We all know that is true. Suffering

will come to all of us inevitably—but we can choose to seek great love. Slow down and look for love.

Make the time and find a place.

We will not accidentally grow into the persons we were created to be. As I've said before, you will not *find* the time; you must *make* the time to be with God. Make the time and find a place to be still. *Be still and know that I am God.*

***Trust silence,
and listen for the still, small voice of God in your heart—
simply listen.***

***Read the stories of Jesus—simply read and sit with them.
Ask God to give you the desires of your heart.***