

## “For the Measure You Give Will Be the Measure You Get Back”

Luke 6: 27-38

We continue in the Gospel of Luke and he just doesn't let up! Last week, he made us uncomfortable with his list of Blessing and Woes. And now, well now, he asks the impossible! He wants us to love our enemies. He wants us to do good to those who hate us. Luke even wants us to do unto others as we would have them do unto us.

Reading through the remainder of this passage, I'm not sure I like where all this is going. Doesn't Luke know how difficult all this will actually be? Doesn't Luke know that this is not how the world works? Doesn't Luke know how impossible all this will be to live out in our lives?

In asking the questions, we have our answer. Yes, Luke knows how difficult what he is asking us to do will be. Yes, Luke knows that what he is asking us to do is not how the world works. And yes, Luke even knows how impossible all this will be to live out in our lives. That's why he includes this part of the passage.

Luke is not asking us to be perfect in this text. In fact, he knows that we will not get it right every time. Rather, what Luke is asking us to do in this passage is to quit offering excuses as to why we can't live out these things and instead live in

ways which reflect our belief, our understanding that God is truly at work in this world bringing healing and wholeness to all of God's children.

Or in the words of author Madeleine L'Engle, "Too often we play at being God rather than being like God. We tend to forget that playing God, if we took it seriously, involves a love so great that it accepts the cross...." If we took being like God seriously, we would know it involves a love so great that it accepts the cross."

You see, too often when we come to texts like this one in our Bible, we tend to throw up our hands, say that they ask the impossible, and then ignore that they even exist. We tend to say that what these type of texts ask of us is too difficult for us to live out and instead go about our own business without allowing them to push us or challenge us into becoming the people God created and calls us to be. Too often, we cynically tell Luke that he has lost touch with reality, that he is too naïve, that he can't comprehend how our world really works nowadays.

Let me just say, Luke is not naïve nor is he crazy for asking the impossible of us as the ones who proclaim a Risen Savior, as ones who proclaim the foolishness of the cross, as ones who say that light and love will always overcome death and darkness. When Luke shares these seemingly impossible requests, Luke is simply reminding us that the very purpose and mission of the Kingdom of God is to throw us off balance. Yes, even us good church folk, especially us good church

folk, you know the ones who like everything black and white, the ones who think we know the rules of the game, you know the very ones who will choose order and stability every single time, even if it means going against what we know to be the Gospel message, you know all that stuff about making justice, loving kindness, being a voice to the voiceless, you know all that stuff about taking care of the stranger. Luke is talking to us, the very ones who will choose the safest way possible if it means we get to stay comfortable and unaffected. In this particular passage, Luke is reminding us that the Kingdom of God doesn't play by our rules. It never has and it never will.

Luke tells us again, because we just don't seem to be getting it, Luke tells us again that the Kingdom of God will do is level the playing field for all of God's children. What the Kingdom of God will do is offend us with its scandalous grace each and every time. What the Kingdom of God will do is invite us to take these words of Jesus seriously and actually try to live them out as people of faith. Imagine what something as simple as that might do in our world. Power and might would no longer be the way relationships are defined. Greed and Hate would no longer destroy communities. Violence and hurt would no longer be the way disagreements are settled. Imagine, just imagine what could happen, what would happen if we as the very ones who have experienced God's grace, as the very ones who experienced God's love in our lives, imagine what would happen if we

actually took Jesus' words seriously, and instead of offering excuses as to why we couldn't, if we actually lived out Jesus' words in our lives as the Gospel Truth.

Again, please don't hear me say that I have all the answers nor that I am the one who models this way of grace and love all the time. Because believe me, I probably get it wrong more times than I get it right. However, that being said, it stands to reason if we as the people of God, if we don't take these requests to love our enemies, to do good to those who hate, to do unto others as we would want them to do unto us, if we as the disciples of Christ, if we don't take these words seriously, then why do we, why should we expect anyone else to either?

Remember, in this section of his Sermon on the Plain, Jesus is not setting up an ethical system. Instead, Jesus is extending an invitation to his disciples to live in a way which reflects the ways of God at work in this world. Jesus is telling his disciples, is telling the crowd that hate and violence should not be what defines their words, should not be what dictates their behavior. Rather, their words, their behaviors, their actions, their relationships with others should be patterned on the very character of their God, a God who since the beginning of time has shown us that God is steadfast in God's love, that God is generous with grace, that God is faithful from generation to generation.

Jesus is calling for a reversal of values as a way for his disciples to overcome evil with good, as a way for his disciples to overcome evil with love.

This is not rocket science. We know how to do this. We do this through peaceful protests. We do this by feeding the hungry. We do this by welcoming the stranger. We do this by not judging others based on the color of their skin, or their sexual orientation or even by their ideologies. We overcome evil with love by being in true authentic relationship with all God's children. We overcome evil with good by inviting someone of differing opinions to have a conversation, not on Facebook, but in person, face to face, over a cup of coffee or by breaking bread with them so that we can get to know them as a person, as a human being beyond our assumptions.

Now, once again, let me be clear, Jesus never promised this whole discipleship was going to be easy but it is what we signed up for when we embraced Jesus as our Lord and Savior.

Or let me say it this way.... This past week, a preacher who I greatly admired shared that in her church, she decided that instead of breaking Jesus' Sermon on the Plain into individual pieces to be read on consecutive Sundays during the month of February, that she would instead read it as a whole for her sermon. She is a lot braver than I am. Because she didn't edit it or leave any of

the uncomfortable pieces out. She read it all... Jesus' very own words, read aloud as her sermon.

This preacher knew what she was risking when she read certain pieces. After all, she serves a prestigious church. A church that takes lots of resources to operate. She also knew that she would make people mad by not going with a safer Scripture, by not going with a Scripture that allows people to leave the church service feeling good about themselves and their place in the world.

This preacher knew what she was risking when she stepped into that pulpit and read Jesus' Sermon on the Plain-complete, as a whole, with nothing left out.

And sure enough, after the worship services were over that day, several people came up to her and shared that they really didn't like or agree with some of her sermon that morning. Now again, let me remind us. She read Jesus' Sermon on the Plain, not her words, Jesus' words.

And here is what I love. She responded to these people as pastorally as she could and said, "I'm sure that when Jesus gave his sermon, several people also told him that they didn't like or agree with some of what he said that day. Because Jesus' very words flew in the face of the Middle Eastern culture to which they were accustomed. Jesus' very words would not allow his disciples nor would it allow the crowd gathered around him to go about business as usual in their broken

and hurting world. So I can only surmise that Jesus looked at this disciples, looked at the people who didn't like what he was saying, Jesus looked at them in the eye as he certainly would us and say, "Yes, that's the point".

May we always find the strength and the courage to embrace the reversal of values being ushered in by the Kingdom of God and may we always find ways to overcome evil with good. Amen.