



SERMON @ SAINT MARY'S

Preacher: David Prentice

February 23, 2025

7th Sunday after the Epiphany

Luke 6:27-38

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord my strength and my redeemer. Amen

Since we did not have services last Sunday, due to the highly uncooperative weather, I have to admit there was a definite temptation to use the sermon I had already written for last week today—but it was for a totally different gospel, so it never would have worked.

So, about this week's Gospel.

Have you noticed in the last few months how tense everyone is? Maybe not just tense, but quick to judge. Easily upset and angry, but judging everyone within their line of sight. Not just politics, but seemingly every sort of issue, personal, private or whatever. General respect and consideration for each other seem rather drastically out of style (not that they were totally in style to begin with!) Things are tense all around, and yet today we hear “Do not judge, and you will not be judged—do not condemn and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven”. This is such that even in prayer and contemplation I have found myself thinking, “Really, God? REALLY?”

Many people read the Scripture hoping to find the rules—a sort of step by step check list for how we can be sure to get into heaven. What we find

instead are what I believe are guidelines for how we can have God's kingdom right here on earth, and have it now, not something we idealistically hope to achieve later.

Today's reading offers some guidelines that are pretty well in direct opposition with everything our culture suggests we should do. Right from the beginning Jesus offers "I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you." Think about those first words for a moment, "I say to those who listen." Do we listen? Do we have these things in minds as we go through out day? Do we hear what these words could mean?

I'm not going to bother to elaborate too much on what culture offers that we should do in these situations. Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you? I don't think so! These are not our cultural responses—if we feel someone has hurt us, society often seems to teach to hurt back! If it doesn't teach it, it certainly seems to condone it.

Speaking of being hurt, Jesus goes on from there with more cultural contradictions. "If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also". Again, I don't think that matches our cultural assumptions—first of all, if someone goes to strike you on the cheek—duck! But offer them the opportunity to do it again?

We then explore generosity—"and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt." I was a bit startled to realize a few years ago that I had 6 coats in the closet, and people were cold outside. Who actually needs 6 coats? I was able to fix that number and hopefully help some people out in the process. And the drive for a generous spirit continues, a bit in the face of our cultural assumptions. Jesus offers "Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again"

But the next part seems to address all the cultural assumptions discussed up to this point with a broad stroke when Jesus offers “Do to others as you would have them do to you”. Try spending a day looking at the world through that lens. See how it affects everything you do. Did you snap at someone or raise your voice? Would you have wanted that if it was you? Was it the best way to communicate? Try this on and see what it does. Would you want to be treated the way you are treating others?

And let’s be clear, there are interpretations I have heard of this idea that go too far. Love your enemies, turn the other cheek, offer all that you have—this is not meant to suggest that being Christian is the same thing as being a doormat. All of these rules need to be approached with awareness and discernment. “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you” but pay attention to what happens around you when you do this.

Much of what Jesus offers us seems to be based in the notion of simply paying attention. All of today’s lessons are prefaced by those words being for “those who listen.” Other parables are full of the message stay awake. It is offered in another section of Luke to “Be on guard, so that your hearts will not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that day will not come on you suddenly like a trap”

Don’t be lulled into sleep and not paying attention by the desires and dictates of our culture—keep your eyes open and look at what gifts are all around you.

Much of our culture seems to look for “credit” for our actions—recognition for who we are and what we have done. We hear much on credit as today’s reading continues, and find the credit may not be worth as much as we believe—“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them.” Challenge yourself—step outside your comfort zone. Who do you need to step outside your area of comfort and show some caring to? Next part is the same thing “If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same”.

Do good where and when it is needed—don't wait for an invitation, but help each other today. "If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again." The language makes this sound financial, but to simplify, if you try to help someone based on what you will get in return, that's not an act of compassion and caring—that's a business transaction. Help each other, because there are days we all need help—and your day may be tomorrow.

And he wraps this up with "But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return" which, of course, runs pretty much right in the face of our usual cultural expectations! Why would we desire to do this? Jesus tells us "Your reward will be great, and you will be children of God." Our reward will be great—I admit, it may not be a reward you can take to the bank, but maybe, just maybe, the rewards we take to the bank don't have to be our priority!

But the challenges in these guidelines for life continue—"Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back."

Do not judge? Tell the truth—how often do you judge someone else? It's a not very pleasant part of human nature, but I will dare say we judge all the time! Myself included—I judged a number of people's ability any time I drive on 128, and I probably will again on the way back home today -especially if I go through the rotary! We judge the way people dress, we judge what people watch on TV, we judge how often they are on their phones. We judge everything and everybody else, which does little more than put up a barrier between us and everyone else.

And you ought to hear how judgmental I can get about people who are judgmental! We need to stop it! All this judgment is an attempt to make ourselves look and feel better. We will be judged and condemned the same

way we judge and condemn. Think about it—we judge people for not following “rules” —that’s part of why I describe these as guidelines.

But in contrast “forgive and you will be forgiven”. I’m going to choose not to elaborate here, but I have had to offer what I felt was some pretty heavy forgiveness—and can honestly not describe how freeing it was after. I have to revisit it sometimes—forgiveness can take time. You should try it. Think for a moment about something or someone you may need to forgive. What would it take? Can you do it? Maybe not magically with a snap of your fingers, but can you make the step?

Giving is the same thing—and I don’t mean the gifts at Christmas, or on a birthday. Maybe it is just something as simple as letting someone merge in traffic. This can be quite a gift based on traffic! Occasionally, without warning, I have brought coffee for someone else in a local coffee shop—no strings, just for fun, and I enjoy the giving!

In a lot of ways all together this seems to come together in two simple ideas. One “Do to others as you would have them do to you.” I know, I know, it’s the golden rule and you’ve heard it a million times on Hallmark cards and syrupy movie, but think about it for a moment—if we all lived this way—how beautiful could the world be? And two, “I say to you that listen”—pay attention, stay awake and alert—look at the world and see all that it offers. If your eyes are open and you watch you will see some pretty amazing things. Yes, you will see some pain, too—but maybe looking at the world this way, we have a better way to address that pain.

The two take away ideas for today are this—do unto others as you would have them do to you—and listen, look, and pay attention. Try them on and see how they feel. *Amen*