

Knowing Jesus in Epiphany  
With Integrity  
7<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Epiphany  
February 24, 2019  
Pastor Dea Sharp, Pikes Peak UMC

Luke 6:27-38 (NRSV)

Love for Enemies

<sup>27</sup> “But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, <sup>28</sup> bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. <sup>29</sup> If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. <sup>30</sup> Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. <sup>31</sup> Do to others as you would have them do to you.

<sup>32</sup> “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. <sup>33</sup> If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. <sup>34</sup> 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. <sup>35</sup> But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return.<sup>[a]</sup> Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. <sup>36</sup> Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

Judging Others

<sup>37</sup> “Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; <sup>38</sup> 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.”

In addition to the verses that Denise just read for us, here are some additional words from Matthew’s gospel; Matthew wraps it all up with: *“This is the essence of all that is taught in the law and the prophets.”* Matthew 7:12 NLT

Can you hear your parent’s voices? Or a Sunday school teacher’s? A mentor’s? Some people would say, “I don’t know what **‘they’re’** teaching kids these days!”

Ethics (or integrity) isn’t something we think about studying much. I know our nephews studied sports ethics in college. And, I had to take a course at seminary but perhaps, that’s about where the “study” stops unless you’re in religious or medical or philosophy courses.

But listen: Jesus is giving us a lesson today. Call it integrity. Call it ethics – we’re getting taught!

The definition of ethics is this: the *moral principles that govern a person's behavior or conduct; the branch of knowledge that deals with moral principles.*

It's often called the Golden Rule, "*Do to others as you would have them do to you*" Luke recorded. (Luke 6:31 NRSV).

The **rule** is found in the Talmud (which is a compilation of Jewish teachings) in the Torah, the Quran AND the Bible. And scholars agree "a rule" is in every religion and civilization around the world.

Often, in other cultures, the rule is given as a negative, "*Don't do anything to anyone that you wouldn't want them to do to you.*"

In other words, the rule there is a restraint.

Jesus' words, in Luke, demands action, not inaction – and it is to initiate good, even when it's undeserved. That's not a restraint! That's being released!

God behaves this way. WHAT if we GOT what we deserve!

So, since God behaves this way, Jesus says, we've got to, too. We can't be lowered to the level of the poor behavior of someone who treats us poorly. We should strive to be more like God who always loves us – even when **we aren't** behaving well.

As I prepared for this worship around our gospel reading, I had to smile at God's timing.

In the past few days hundreds of delegates and many more hundreds of observers and support staff and journalists have begun to assemble in St. Louis for the speciall called General Conference to discuss the Way Forward of the UMC. Oh what an opportunity for prayer and all of us to focus on the Golden Rule and the rest of the reading which includes: "*Love your enemies*" and "*pray for those who mistreat you.*"

It goes without saying the getting TO the General Conference has included literally truckloads of information and opposing opinion. That's not new to the UMC. For

decades (centuries even) we, as a denomination have struggled with civil rights and equal rights. Mostly, for decades, we've shown our dysfunction to the world, (the journalist are having a heyday) making those looking in at us, wonder "why should I even set foot in the door?"

Now, it's important for us to remember that the REAL enemy, in my *humble* opinion, in our current condition is not another group of people – not straight or gay or transgender; or based on color, or which bathroom we use. It's not people! Straight up – it's Satan, the enemy of our souls who wants United Methodists to devour one another like other denominations have had happen.

The LAST thing the enemy wants for us is to live out Jesus' words.

Remember last Sunday, with Jesus' beatitudes, I said that Jesus was presenting us with a way to live differently...to adjust our thinking and attitudes and values to how God's kingdom is put together. His sermon continues in today's reading with MORE counter-intuitive instruction.

The General Conference cannot be worldly.

That's one of the reasons I've been sending you a daily prayer focus.

Conference can't be worldly!

And we can't be either, in our little part of the world.

In the world, political strategies rule.

And we don't need politics OR strategies to address what comes down to a spiritual problem.

We can't let it be THE world.

We have to make it God's world.

And God's WORD.

Most of us (all) have grown up in the U.S. and only known democracy.

Democracy, and our 3 branches of governance, is the basis of the structure of the UMC, too.

But, we all can admit (even if we don't agree) that we/the world has evolved a "winner takes all" attitude in politics, journalism, in our culture and our church. We're becoming increasingly divided, demonizing each other and we aren't listening...to each other or, more importantly, to Jesus' teaching.

He said, (v. 27) *"But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies..."*

Jesus is challenging the crowd (and us) to hear.

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES!

What?!

He doesn't say, "listen to them" (although that should be a part of the equation) he says LOVE THEM!

Can you imagine the crowd's reaction to THIS part of the sermon?

Do you remember the first few times YOU read it?

It's absurd by worldly standards.

I imagine many walked away.

Some may have wanted to "make a deal" wondering who can I love without risking what I have?

Still more may have begun thinking about HOW they could love their enemies...not just the work of doing it, but the mere suggestion...*how could I love "them."*

The responses weren't all the same...anymore than they are today.

But Jesus isn't asking us to agree.

He's advising us...instructing us...TELLING US to love one another.

See, he's talking about the kingdom of God, where love **is the** rule, not an eye for an eye.

To love.

To be generous and not expect anything in return.

To be "compassionate just as God is compassionate."

Jesus is serious about the words he spoke that day.

And as we hear his words, and make them part of who we are, we know he's speaking to us...and we *SHOULD* know the love he has for us....even at our worst.

And he's telling us, pretty clearly (not even a suggestion anymore), how we should live our lives.

How quick are we at judging others—their actions, their look, their situations, their behaviors.

Love them instead.

Do unto them as you'd have them do to you. 'Cause the old saying IS true: unless we walk in somebody else's shoes, we can't really understand what they're going through.

Our "job" is to love others...without stopping to ask whether or not they're worthy.

'Cause even if THEY, the ones we're trying to love (our enemies)...even if THEY don't exhibit the same kind of response back to us, WE ARE STILL, and because we've been instructed BY OUR LORD, we are STILL being OBSERVED BY **OUR ACTIONS**...by God and by those others who've been asking "why *should* I want to set foot among them?"

Could we be more generous for others, even in our giving to our church?

Think about it: Do we REALLY believe that as we give, so it will be given to us?

Jesus words, preserved for us in God's Word tell us that we're called to be different from others, especially in our behavior toward others.

I read a Toby Mac quote recently that said "***Decisions [make that our ethics and our integrity] become easier when our will to please God outweighs our will to please the world.***"

The early Christians were looked upon by others and it was said of them how they loved each other.

Will that be said of us, 21<sup>st</sup> century people who call ourselves by the name of Christ?

The current Book of Discipline of the UMC says this:

*“The people of God, who are the church made visible in the world, must convince the world of the reality of the gospel or leave it (the world) unconvinced. (2016 para. 130.)*

So how do we, Dear Family of Faith of PPUMC, convince the world of the reality of the words of Scripture that we’ve heard today; of the gospel that Jesus preached?

Well, we’ve got to focus on compassion and love.

And a good start is listening to each other; especially those with different opinions, and using that moment as an opportunity to love.

The LOUDEST VOICE in a discussion doesn’t.always.win.

Extending love doesn’t mean control.

And extending compassion doesn’t mean expecting something in return.

It *may not even be the moment of* hearing that will end up in agreement.

But, by showing love, as Jesus teaches, we can be *really compelling* and convince the world, lovingly.

It IS the gospel message: *“But I say to you who are willing to hear: (Jesus says) Love your enemies.*

If we’re going to convince the world of the gospel of Jesus Christ, we’ve got to live the way of love every day and in all parts of our lives.

THAT has to be the basis of OUR personal definition of ethics and integrity – the HOW we’re going to live.

It says in 1 John (4:11)

*“Dear Friends, since God loved us...surely we ought to love each other.”*

It is the core of our mission.

It is God’s call for us, Jesus’ last command to us, to make disciples and transform the world.

When we love, especially our enemies,

...we will make a difference. We’ll be stoppin’ “them” in their tracks!

...we’ll continue Jesus’ counter-intuitive teaching about God’s kingdom, and heck, just plain startle others into their own transformation.

When we love “they’ll” know.

We’re not singing it today, but we could...

*“And they’ll know we are Christians by our love, by our love. Yes, they’ll know we are Christians by our love.”*

Amen!