

7th Sunday after Epiphany

Luke 6:27-38.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all Amen.

The text for our sermon for this Sunday is written in the book of Luke 6:27-38 which was our gospel reading before.

27 “However, I tell 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 the cheek, offer him the other also! If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic as well! 30 Give to everyone who asks you, and, if someone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back! 31 Treat other people in exactly the same way as you want them to treat you! 32 If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. 33 For, if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do the same. 34 If you lend to those from whom you expect to get it back, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners to get equal payment back. 35 Rather, love your enemies! Do good, and lend, without expecting to get anything back! Then your reward will be great, and you will be the children of the Most High, because He is kind to ungrateful and wicked people. 36 Be merciful, as your Father also is merciful! 37 “Stop judging; and you will certainly not be judged. Stop condemning; and you will certainly not be condemned. Forgive; and you will be forgiven. 38 Give; and it will be given to you. People will put a good measure, pressed together, shaken down, and running over, into your lap. For the measure with which you measure others will be used for you in return.”

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Peace be with you.

The culture we live in has suffered some very sad and some very strange changes. These changes have become especially obvious since the election of our new prime minister "*Scot - mo*," Scott Morrison, who's at the end of a long line of Prime ministers over the last few years, and it looks like it's not over yet with an election looming in the non distant future! The debate in our culture has changed. At one time, we struggled to discern between truth and error ... right and wrong. That struggle used words and civil debate to try to draw out the truth of any situation ... to determine what was the right and wrong action to take at the current time. And most decisions being judged by the media.

For many people that has changed. Discerning truth from error and right from wrong are no longer important. Now many in our culture insist on basing decisions on what makes them feel good and what makes them feel bad. The goal is total, instant happiness, pleasure, and gratification. Furthermore, society should do everything within its power to remove all negative consequences of any decision a person makes in their personal quest for total, instant happiness, pleasure, and gratification. Society is supposed to step aside and allow anyone to do anything ... even self-destructive things ... if that is how the person is to achieve happiness, pleasure, and gratification. Love means letting me do what I want even it means destroying myself in the process.

Civil debate is gone. People use personal attacks to assert their point of view. Peaceful demonstration has been replaced by riots and destruction. The slightest offense causes people to react with violent rage. Everything has become personal.

The words that we heard from Jesus' Sermon this morning are especially relevant for such a time as this. Jesus opened his mouth and taught them, saying: **“Love your enemies! Do good to those who hate you! Bless those who curse you! Pray for those who mistreat you! If someone strikes you on the cheek, offer him the other also! If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic as well!... If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them.... Rather, love your enemies!... Be merciful, as your Father also is merciful!... “Stop judging; and you will certainly not be judged. Stop condemning; and you will certainly not be condemned. Forgive; and you will be forgiven.... For the measure with which you measure others will be used for you in return.”**

The principles that Jesus taught are in direct contradiction to the principles of today's culture. Our culture proposes revenge and violence in retaliation to any offense, anything that you make comment on today can be labelled as Racist or Sexist! Jesus, on the other hand, taught us to forgive the offense ... to love the offender. He even taught us to make ourselves vulnerable to a second attack ... to turn the other cheek ... to walk the extra mile. He taught us to pray for those who make our lives miserable.

Now I must confess that I find this very difficult. I still remember incidents from my childhood when bullies would pick on me. I confess that there are times when I fantasize about different ways that I could get even with them. They probably don't even remember me ... it was well over fifty years ago ... but I remember them ... and I remember the pain. Jesus taught that I must love these men who were boys back then. I must forgive them. I must pray for them. I really didn't want to do that. I wanted revenge instead. The words of Paul come to mind: **I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.** [Romans 7:15.]

What about you? Do you love your enemies? Are you ready to turn the other cheek ... to walk the extra mile? Do you love the one who offended you? Do you love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you? It's tough ... isn't it?

Then as if we aren't guilty enough already, Jesus calls on us to follow the example of God the Father. [Your Father who is in heaven] **makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.** [Matthew 5:45-48,]

As Christians – people who have been adopted into the family of God – we are to follow the example of our heavenly Father and love all people – even the most unlovable. Even the dregs of society are kind to their friends. Instead we are to be perfect just as our Father in Heaven is perfect and love even our enemies. I find that I am all too ready to take offense when someone loves me enough to point out an uncomfortable truth. The saying goes, “Better to light a candle than curse the darkness.” But how often do we enjoy cursing the darkness? How often do people enjoy tearing someone to shreds verbally rather than examine what that person says in the light of God's truth – the Bible? How often do we cut someone down so that we can feel better about ourselves?

Jesus calls for us to follow the example of His father by loving our enemies and praying for our persecutors. He calls for us to set aside insults and offenses – to willingly submit to inconveniences and trials. He calls for us to be perfect even as our Father in Heaven is perfect. He calls for all these things and we fail miserably even myself.

Fortunately, when Jesus asks us to do things that are beyond our ability, He does them for us. He did more than suffer the slap of insult. He endured cruel beating by mockers and flogging by soldiers. He did more than carry a burden for a mile. He carried the sin of the world – your sin – my sin – our unloving sin of gossip – our inability to love our enemies – our desire to exalt ourselves by damaging others – He carried it all to the cross and there He died to pay for it all. He gives us more than a cloak and tunic. He gives us forgiveness, life, and salvation. He gives us the robes of His righteousness.

He does all this in love for His enemies as the Holy Spirit inspired the Apostle Paul to write: **"For, while we were still helpless, at the set time Christ died for ungodly people. 7 For very rarely will someone die for a righteous person, although someone might perhaps even dare to die for a good person. 8 However, God shows His own love for us by this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.** [Romans 5:6-8.]. Christ died for sinners ... for the ungodly ... for those who are by nature His enemies. It's for enemies that Christ gives the ultimate love. It's to enemies that Christ offers forgiveness, life, and salvation. It's to enemies that Christ offers His loving heart.

As Christ offers His love to His enemies, so also the Holy Spirit works in those enemies to change them. The Holy Spirit works in God's enemies to convert them into God's adopted sons. He gives them the faith that receives all the gifts that Christ has earned for them. By the perfect, loving power of the Holy Spirit we become children of the Most High. We become the children who live with Him forever.

With the exception of Jesus Himself, every human being enters this world as God's enemy. God terrifies us and we want nothing to do with Him. As a result of the love that God the Father has for us – His natural born

enemies – He sent His only begotten Son into the world, into our flesh to rescue us. As the result of the intense and perfect love that God’s Son Jesus Christ has for us – His natural born enemies – He took our animosity to the cross and defeated it. He endured the punishment that His enemies deserved. Now He and the Father send the Holy Spirit to work in us by Word and sacrament. As a result of the love that God the Holy Spirit has for us – His natural born enemies – we now have the faith that receives all the blessings of God’s love. We are no longer God’s enemies. We are His eternal children.

As His children, God enables us to do that which is impossible. The Holy Spirit transforms us with God’s love. Now that we have eternal salvation in Christ Jesus, He gives the love that loves our enemies ... turns the other cheek ... walks the extra mile. You were God’s enemy, but in His love, He redeemed you. His love at work through you can also redeem others. It may even redeem others who are now your enemies. While we live here in this sinful world, we shall never be perfect, as [our] heavenly Father is perfect. Nevertheless, because Jesus loved us and died for us while we were still sinners, the day will come when God will call us to leave this world and enter eternity. There in eternity, we shall attain the perfection that God has for us while we enjoy eternal life in His presence. **Amen**
The peace of God, which is beyond all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. **Amen.**

Prayer of the Church 7th Sunday after the Epiphany 2019.

P Let us pray for the whole people of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

Brief silence

We pray, Lord, with Joseph of old, who endured hardship and struggle and yet believed it would come to good. Bring all things to completion according to Your wisdom and purpose in Him who as the new Adam has brought hope to a world in sin and death, even Jesus Christ, our Lord. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P We pray, Lord, for guidance amid the changes and chances of this mortal life. Deliver us from the pangs of doubt and from the paralysis of fear. Help us to know with joy our Lord Jesus Christ and the power of His resurrection, that we may not surrender to anxiety or despair. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P We pray, Lord, for Your Church; for an end to the earthly divisions that grieve You; for the true unity of doctrine and faith in Your Word; and for those who lead us in the AELC and ULMA, and our congregations. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P We pray, Lord, for all our pastors, and church workers. Lead them to be faithful in their service and to serve Your people with compassion and love. Bless all the places where we hear Your Word and serve our neighbour in Christ’s name, both here in this place and throughout the world. We pray for a new Pastor to be found to come and join us in our quest to continue the preaching of Your Word among us. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P We pray, Lord, for the civil authority and for those responsible to You for the welfare of our nation, state and community. Help them to pursue faithfully the cause of justice and to protect and defend life from its natural beginning to its natural end. Guard all first responders, and protect those who defend us both here and abroad. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P We pray, Lord, for Your comfort upon all who suffer. Deliver the sick according to Your will, and sustain those troubled in body or soul by Your grace. [especially, _____]. Relieve their suffering in the way and at the time You know best. Grant them faith and patience as they wait for You. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P We pray, Lord, for Your love to have its way with us. Lead us to expect no reward, and teach us from Your own example not to act from self-interest but to love even our enemies and to serve those in need. End all bitterness and strife, and let Your forgiveness cover us in our lives together as You cover us with the blood of Christ before Your heavenly throne. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P We pray, Lord, in thanksgiving for the gift of this Holy Supper and for a right heart as we prepare to commune upon the flesh and blood of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. By our reception of this blessed Sacrament, equip us with Your love, that we may love You above all and our neighbours as ourselves. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P We pray, Lord, that You will bring all things to completion, each according to Your own order and in Your time. And when Christ comes, we pray that You will number us among the saints in glory as the dead are raised and the perishable is clothed with the imperishable — just as our Saviour has promised. Give to us and to all the faithful the inheritance prepared for us from before the foundation of the world as we anticipate in this communion the marriage feast of the Lamb in His Kingdom without end. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P We pray, Lord, to grant us these and all things good and wholesome and profitable to our salvation, through the merits and mercies of Jesus Christ, our Saviour, in union with You and the Holy Spirit, the one eternal God, now and forever. **Amen.**