

Luke 6:27-38

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Luke's Epiphany series: "Does Jesus Ask Too Much?"

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Do you ever wonder if maybe, just maybe, Jesus asks too much of us? The instructions he gives us today -- the words I just read from Luke chapter 6 -- are challenging, demanding, maybe even disturbing. "Love your enemies. Do good to them, bless them, pray for them." It's hard enough sometimes to just get along in our families, to keep the peace with our loved ones. But Jesus wants us to love our enemies! Actively, sincerely love them! Does he ask too much?

It's tempting to just skip these paragraphs in Luke's Gospel. Can't I be a good Christian without loving my enemies, without turning the other cheek, and without giving to everyone who begs from me? Why does Jesus insist that our Christian love should be just like his?

Let's talk about his. Was Christ's love reserved for the good people only? Did Jesus love just his friends, his family, and a few pleasant neighbors who were nice to him? Or did Christ's love embrace everyone, enemies included? Did Jesus lovingly sacrifice himself on the cross to forgive only the sins of true believers like you and me? Or did his love cover his enemies, too?

Think about what actually happened on Good Friday. When they arrested him, when they put him on trial, when his enemies told lies about him, beat him up, spit on him, made fun of him, and crucified him, Jesus didn't retaliate. He literally turned the other cheek. And then, hanging from his cross of torture, he took time to pray forgiveness for his enemies

And still today, Jesus doesn't offer his love only to the spiritual superstars among us. He loves the good, the bad, the ugly, the successful, the failures, the ninety-nine sheep who are in the fold where they belong, and the one lost sheep who's wandering out there in the wilds. Jesus loves us all: the Christians, the atheists, the believers, the non-believers, his faithful disciples and friends, and even his enemies.

"Love your enemies," he tells you and me today. Why does Jesus insist that our Christian love should be just like his? Does he ask too much?

Well, consider what Christ's love has done for us. Without Christ's love, I'm just a poor, miserable sinner. Without the saving love of Jesus, I'm still a rebel in God's eyes, still God's enemy. And you, too. But Christ's love has embraced you, forgiven you, saved you, made you God's precious, beloved child. What has Christ's love done for us? Everything!

So when Jesus tells us today that our love should be just like his, he has a glorious purpose in mind for others. He wants us to love our enemies, so that they, too, get a glimpse and come to know his saving love for them.

Jesus challenges us today to demonstrate his kind of startling, astounding, atypical, unworldly love. "Go so far as to love your enemies," he says. "Don't just love those who love you. Anyone can do that. Show love, concern, care, and respect even for your enemies!"

It's an astonishing thing for someone who's been mistreated, slandered, or made fun of to respond with kindness. The world teaches us to always fight back, to stand up for ourselves, to never let anyone push us around. But Jesus

tells us today – if our ears are open to hear – to be ready and willing to love our enemies.

Now, he's not talking here to little children. Jesus isn't speaking to brand-new Christians, and expecting them to live by this rule right away. Jesus says in verse 27, "But I say to you who hear" In other words, "to those who are taking my words to heart." He's talking to those of us who know his grace, who've experienced and who treasure his forgiving love. Is that you? Jesus is calling you to love your enemies!

"Love them," he says. What exactly does Jesus mean by that word, "love?" The Greek word here, "love," is the verb *agapate*. This is *agape* love, the highest form of love. This word denotes the love of intelligence, comprehension, and purpose. This is love that sees clearly all the wicked hate and nasty tricks of the enemy, acknowledges his hurtful stabs and blows, may even appropriately do something to ward them off. But this kind of love also sees a greater purpose. This kind of love fills the heart with the desire and aim to free its enemy from his hate, to rescue him from his sin, and to save his soul.

That's what Jesus did for us. His love saw all the misery of our sinful condition, but resolved to do what needed to be done to get us on the right track and save us.

Love like that – love that sees, comprehends, and grasps a deeper purpose – such love is a powerful thing. Love like that, when we put it out there, can sometimes stop an enemy in his tracks, cause him astonishment and unease. Love like that can make even an enemy question from where does such an unusual love come.

And we know the answer, don't we? It comes only from God. "Be merciful," Jesus says, "even as your Father is merciful."

Only by receiving such powerful love from our Savior can we ever share it.

Now, let's be clear on what Jesus is asking. He's not demanding that we put on blinders, and pretend not to see the evil in our enemies. We may look upon the nasty, unfriendly people who hurt us and tell lies about us, and not see anything attractive in them at all. We might have no desire to befriend them or make a social peace with them.

But, by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, we can love them all. Namely, we can see just what is wrong with them, desire something better for them, and to this end do everything possible to help them know Jesus' love for them.

Love your enemies. Does Jesus ask too much? He loves us enough to ask even this: to love others with his love; to love even an enemy.

Let's pray. Lord, this is a hard teaching today. But we know – and we've experienced it – that your love is more powerful than anything. And we know that your love would reach others through us. So teach us to see and love others, as you see and love us. Amen.