

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2022

LUKE 6:27-38

TRADITIONAL

LOVING OUR ENEMIES, DO GOOD TO THOSE WHO HATE US, BLESS THOSE WHO CURSE US, PRAY FOR THOSE WHO MISTREAT US... THESE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN RADICAL IDEAS. AND YET, IN BOTH OUR GOSPEL FOR TODAY AND OUR READING FROM GENESIS, WE SEE THESE VERY THINGS.

LONG BEFORE JOSEPH'S BROTHERS HAD WANTED TO KILL HIM, JOSEPH WAS A SPOILED BRAT. HE WAS DADDY'S FAVORITE. HIS BROTHERS HAD TO WORK AND JOSEPH GOT TO HANG AROUND THE HOUSE. JOSEPH WAS THE YOUNGEST, AND WAS GIVEN A SPECIAL COAT BY HIS FATHER WHICH HE WORE AS A SIGN OF BEING TOP IN HIS FATHER'S EYES.

JOSEPH WAS A DREAMER, IN THE REAL SENSE OF HAVING DREAMS WHICH HE TOOK GREAT PLEASURE IN RETELLING, DREAMS WHERE HIS FAMILY, AND EVEN THE WHOLE WORLD WOULD BOW DOWN TO HIM. INEVITABLY, THE DAY CAME WHEN ALL THIS WAS SIMPLY TOO MUCH FOR THE BROTHERS, AND THEY SCHEMED TO KILL HIM.

WE KNOW THAT DIDN'T HAPPEN, INSTEAD, THEY SOLD HIM INTO SLAVERY AND JOSEPH ENDED UP IN EGYPT. THE FATHER THOUGHT HE WAS DEAD, AND THE BROTHERS THOUGHT THEY WERE DONE WITH HIM.

JOSEPH'S STORY IS A CRAZY ONE WHERE HE GOES FROM BEING FALSELY IMPRISONED, TO BEING SET FREE AND RAISED TO ONE OF THE HIGHEST OFFICES IN ALL OF EGYPT, NEXT ONLY TO PHARAOH. NONE OF THIS WAS HIS OWN DOING, HOWEVER, BUT RATHER THE RESULT OF THE WISDOM AND DISCERNMENT GIVEN TO HIM AS A GIFT BY GOD.

FOR SEVEN YEARS, JOSEPH OVERSEES A GREAT PROJECT, WHERE THE PEOPLE WOULD SET ASIDE A PORTION OF EVERY YEAR'S HARVEST, SO THAT WHEN FAMINE COMES, EGYPT WILL BE PREPARED.

LIFE IS GOOD FOR JOSEPH, EVEN A FEW YEARS INTO THE FAMINE, AND THEN HIS BROTHERS SHOW UP TO BUY GRAIN. HE RECOGNIZES THEM, BUT THEY FAIL TO DO THE SAME TO HIM...

LET'S STOP HERE FOR A MINUTE AND PONDER THIS SITUATION – WHAT WILL JOSEPH DO? WHAT WOULD YOU DO IN A SITUATION LIKE THIS? SURELY, JOSEPH REMEMBERS EVERYTHING HIS BROTHERS DID TO HIM, ALL THE SUFFERING HE HAD TO ENDURE. SURELY HE HAD SOME STRONG FEELINGS ABOUT ALL OF THAT. AND NOW HERE THEY WERE, COMPLETELY IN HIS CONTROL. HE COULD DO WHATEVER HE WANTED WITH THEM, INCLUDING GET REVENGE FOR

ALL THE YEARS OF UNJUST SUFFERING BECAUSE OF THEM. BUT THAT'S NOT WHAT HAPPENS, IS IT?

THE BROTHERS COME TO THE REALIZATION OF WHO JOSEPH IS – THEIR BROTHER! THEY SEE THAT HE INTENDS THEM NO HARM AND THEY ARE AMAZED. JOSEPH CALLS THEM CLOSE AND EMBRACES THEM, AND IN DOING SO, A FAMILY ONCE TORN APART IS RESTORED WITH JOY.

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES, JESUS SAID. DO GOOD TO THOSE WHO HATE YOU, BLESS THOSE WHO CURSE YOU, PRAY FOR THOSE WHO HATE YOU....RADICAL INDEED. HOW CAN A PERSON IN THEIR RIGHT MIND LOVE SOMEONE WHO HURTS THEM? HOW CAN WE LOVE THE ONE WHO GOSSIPS ABOUT US, WHO CHEATS ON US, WHO USES US FOR THEIR OWN GAIN, OR WHO COLDLY IGNORES US? HOW CAN WE LOVE OUR ENEMY, (WHOEVER THAT IS) WHEN EVERYTHING WE HAVE EXPERIENCED ABOUT THEM MAKES US WANT TO HURT AS WE HAVE BEEN HURT.

WE WOULD RATHER WAIT TO LOVE ONCE WE HAVE GOTTEN OUR SWEET REVENGE, WHEN THE PLAYING FIELD IS LEVELED AND JUSTICE HAS BEEN RESTORED. BUT LOVE OUR ENEMIES BEFORE ALL THAT?

THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT JESUS IS TALKING ABOUT HERE, AND THE REASON IS SIMPLE: REVENGE DOESN'T WORK. AS THE SAYING GOES, "REVENGE IS A DISH BEST SERVED COLD." SEE, THE SCALES OF JUSTICE CAN NEVER BE EXACTLY BALANCED.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. SAID IT BEST WHEN PEOPLE WERE CALLING FOR REVENGE AFTER HIS HOUSE WAS BURNED DOWN, "WHEN YOU LIVE BY THE RULE AN EYE FOR AN EYE AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH, YOU END UP WITH A NATION OF BLIND AND TOOTHLESS PEOPLE."

SO HOW DO WE LOVE OUR ENEMIES – THOSE FOR WHOM WE FEEL NO LOVE? FIRST, WE HAVE TO UNDERSTAND THAT LOVE DOES NOT DEPEND ON HOW WE FEEL. IF IT DID, THERE WOULD BE MANY A MARRIED COUPLE SITTING HERE TODAY WHO WOULD HAVE WALKED AWAY A LONG TIME AGO, BECAUSE ONCE THE HONEYMOON IS OVER, THE REAL WORK OF LOVING "TIL DEATH PARTS US" BEGINS.

SEE, FEELINGS ARE UNRELIABLE, WHEN IT COMES TO ACTING ON LOVE. WHO OF US HASN'T BEEN ANNOYED BY OUR SPOUSE, OUR LOVED ONES AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER. OUR COMMITMENT TO THEM, A COMMITMENT ROOTED IN AND SHAPED BY LOVE CANNOT DEPEND ON HOW WE FEEL AT ANY GIVEN MOMENT. LOVE IS BASED ON AND MEASURED BY OUR ACTIONS.

JESUS TELLS US WHAT LOVE DOES. IT BLESSES RATHER THAN CURSES. IT IS MERCIFUL AS GOD IS MERCIFUL. IT FORGIVES AS GOD FORGIVES, WITH NO EXPECTATION OF REWARD OR VENGEANCE.

WHY? BECAUSE JESUS TELLS US “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 IN YOUR LAP. FOR THE MEASURE YOU GIVE WILL BE THE MEASURE YOU GET BACK.

THIS IS THE PROMISE, ROOTED IN OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD. WE DON'T FORGIVE BECAUSE WE ARE BEING UNSELFISH AND CONCERNED ABOUT THE ONE WHO HURT US. WE FORGIVE BECAUSE WE OURSELVES KNOW WE NEED FORGIVENESS. WE OURSELVES HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN TIME AND AGAIN BY THE GOD WHO LOVES US, EVEN WHEN WE HURT HIM. WE BLESS, NOT BECAUSE WE ARE MAGNANIMOUS IN OUR GIVING, WE BLESS BECAUSE WE KNOW WE OURSELVES NEED TO BE BLESSED. WE OURSELVES HAVE BEEN BLESSED ABUNDANTLY BY THE GOD WHO LOVES US. AND WE SHOW MERCY BECAUSE WE KNOW WE WOULD BE LOST WITH OUT THE MERCY BESTOWED ON US TIME AND AGAIN BY THE GOD WHO LOVES US.

HIS LOVE, GIVEN TO US IS THE ONLY THING THAT CAN OVERCOME HATE. HIS BLESSING IS THE ONLY THING THAT CAN OVERCOME CURSING. HIS FORGIVENESS IS THE ONLY THING THAT CAN RIGHT A WRONG.

THIS IS WHY JESUS INTRODUCES ANOTHER POSSIBILITY – WHICH SEEMS AS CRAZY TODAY AS IT DID BACK THEN:

RETURN VIOLENCE WITH PEACE
RETURN HATE WITH LOVE
ANGER WITH PATIENCE
FEAR WITH COMFORT,
STINGINESS WITH GENEROSITY
SIN WITH FORGIVENESS AND
INJUSTICE WITH MERCY.

SEE, WHAT JESUS DOES, IS HE POINTS TO THE VERY NATURE OF GOD – THE ONE WHO IS MERCIFUL AND LOVING, EVEN TO THOSE WHO DON'T DESERVE IT. AND YES, MY FRIENDS, THAT INCLUDES EACH AND EVERY ONE OF US.

AND THE ONLY THING THAT INVITES THAT KIND OF LOVE THAT GOES BEYOND SELF-INTEREST IS BEING LOVED. THE ONE THING THAT PROMPTS MERCY THAT IS NOT SELF-SERVING, IS RECEIVING MERCY. SO JESUS DIRECTS OUR ATTENTION TO GOD, THE ONE WHO ABOUNDS IN COMPASSION AND MERCY, LOVE AND FORGIVENESS.

AND BECAUSE THAT'S SO HARD FOR US TO BELIEVE, JESUS ULTIMATELY WON'T JUST TALK ABOUT LOVE, HE'LL SHOW IT WITH HIS ARMS OPEN WIDE UPON THE CROSS, TO OFFER GOD'S LOVING EMBRACE TO EACH AND ALL OF US.

JOSEPH SEEMED TO KNOW THIS LONG AGO. HE FORGAVE, HE BLESSED, HE LOVED. BUT JOSEPH IS NOT THE HERO HERE. WHAT HIS STORY TELLS US IS THAT GOD IS THE ONE WHO HAD BEEN AT WORK IN ALL THAT HAPPENED, FROM THE FIRST BETRAYAL BY HIS BROTHERS TO THE HEALING THAT HAPPENED AT THE END. GOD IS THE ONE WHO WAS ACTING THROUGH JOSEPH BECAUSE JOSEPH WAS OBEDIENT.

WHEN YOU AND I OBEY, WHEN WE TRUST GOD'S WAY WITH US, WE TOO BECOME SIGNS OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD. SOMETIMES IT FEELS GOOD. SOMETIMES IT DOESN'T. SOMETIMES LOVING AND BLESSING AND FORGIVING HURT. BUT THROUGH THE BLOOD OF JESUS ON THE CROSS, WE ARE ABLE.

AND SO WE BLESS BECAUSE WE HAVE FIRST BEEN BLESSED. WE FORGIVE, BECAUSE WE HAVE FIRST BEEN FORGIVEN THROUGH THE WATERS OF BAPTISM. AND WE LOVE, BECAUSE THROUGH GOD'S NEVER-ENDING LOVE FOR US, WE HAVE BEEN TRANSFORMED.

IN THE NAME OF JESUS. AMEN.