



Central Peninsula Church

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Luke 6: 27–36

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Love Beyond Our Limits

SERIES: *A Savior for All People*

This morning we celebrate Palm Sunday, which marks the beginning of Holy Week. And as we rejoice in the triumphal entry of the King into Jerusalem, we're reminded that when the King comes He stirs things up. Because the King brings with Him the values and priorities of a whole new Kingdom. That's what we saw last week in Luke chapter 6. So we're going to continue this morning as we listen to the words of King Jesus speaking to our hearts about the radical nature of the Kingdom of God.

I heard a story this week about a young pastor who had just begun his ministry at his first church. Wanting to get to know the people in his fellowship he made a habit of meeting a few new folks each week. One Sunday morning he got in a conversation with one of the oldest members of his church who turned out to be a long time believer who had walked faithfully with the Lord and was now in his nineties. And as they were getting to know each other the man said, "Ya know, I'm proud to say that I don't have an enemy in the world."

The young pastor was impressed and he said, "Wow, that's great. That must come from a deep faith and lifetime commitment to be obedient to the Lord, seeking after His humility and grace in your life." The old man smiled for a minute and said, "No, it's just that I've managed to outlive them all!"

We all have enemies, don't we. People we find it difficult to be around. People who, for whatever reason, have managed to push all our buttons. Some who have treated us without respect. Others who have crossed over boundaries leaving hurts, resentments and wounds, some of which may run to the very core of who we are even to this day.

And whether it's someone who's inflicted a wound in the past or a hurtful relationship in the present—a co-worker, a difficult neighbor, or someone in your own family—each of us has a list. A list of folks that are just hard for us to deal with. Of course we all relate to the people on our list in our own way. Some of us avoid them at any cost. Others of us nurse our bitterness and speak critically behind their backs. Some of us even secretly dream of ways to get back. But the question for us this morning as followers of Christ is this: How do we treat our enemies? As subjects of the King, how are we to respond to those who (through word or action), harm or mistreat us?

I think for many of us here this morning, myself

included, this is one of the most sensitive and yet critical questions of the Christian life. And for some of you today you know that this is exactly where your faith is being tested. How do we respond to our enemies? Let's turn to Luke chapter 6 as Christ the King speaks to this sensitive and critical question.

I. Radical Love Proclaimed.

"But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you pray for those who mistreat you" (Luke 6:27–28).

After last week I was hoping that Jesus might ease up a bit. Last week He took four well placed shots: announcing a blessing on the poor, the hungry, the hurting and the hated. And four corresponding warnings to the rich, the well fed, the comfortable, and the popular. But King Jesus hasn't let up at all. And in these two small verses He speaks of a radical kind of love that is simply beyond our limits. He says to anyone who has ears to hear, love your enemies! Is that crazy or what?

Now as a backdrop to this it's important to know that the Jews of Jesus' day had many enemies. There were the Greeks who belittled them, the Barbarians who discussed them. And the Jews held on to a deep seated anger and bitterness against the Romans who treated them with contempt and often accused them and beat them without cause. I'm sure the disciples had a list a mile long of those who had offended and hurt them through the years. But beyond that, Jesus is preparing them for the persecution that was to come; the betrayal and brutality that would follow them for the rest of their lives on account of their faith in Christ.

So to the hated and mistreated Jews and to the disciples who would soon suffer severe persecution, Jesus says, "Love your enemies!" And then to be sure we understand Jesus spells it out. He says love your enemies by doing good to those who hate you, by blessing those who curse you, by praying for those who mistreat you.

So in every aspect of our response we are to love in return. In our actions we're to "do good." In our words we are to speak a blessing. And it says in our prayers we're to intercede on behalf of those who mistreat us. I don't know about you but this runs against every impulse, every reflex and instinct inside of me. This is a hard word from our King to us, isn't it?

In fact, the form of all three of these verbs (to do, to bless, and to pray) indicate that this is to be an ongoing activity. I'm to continually love my enemy,

doing good to them, blessing them and praying for them as an ongoing expression of the radical nature of this love. If you're familiar with all the steroid news in baseball you know that this would be like telling Mark McGwire to take José Canseco to dinner, pick him up at his house, tell him how good he looks, pray over him, and then do it again the next day and the next day.

There are actually four words for love that are used in the N.T. One has to do with family affection, another has to do with the bonds of friendship. The Greeks even had a word for romantic love, the kind of love that we so highly treasure and sing about in our culture today. The kind of love that causes people to write songs like "Why do birds suddenly appear every time you are near." But this is not the kind of love that Jesus is talking about here.

Jesus uses the word agape. Agape is not the kind of love that you fall in and out of. It's not rooted in natural inclinations or impulse. But in fact it's a love that is rooted in our commitment to Christ and operates in obedience to Him, sometimes in spite of our instincts. Mike Mason writes: This kind of love "is a deep, continuous, growing and ever-renewing activity of the will superintended by the Holy Spirit." You know, sometimes we get so familiar with this that we forget that Jesus is initiating a brand new, outrageous ethic of love that is rooted in the priorities of a brand new Kingdom. This radical love is not only beyond human instinct, it's beyond the conventions of social behavior or recourse. For the disciples the measure of how you were supposed to treat your enemies, was laid down in what was known as the ethic of retaliation as stated in Exodus 21. **"If men are fighting...and there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise."**

In other words, when it comes to your enemies you take whatever was taken from you. It's kind of like hockey: If he punched out your tooth then you punch out his. If he stomps on your foot you grind your skate into his toe. The punishment must fit the crime: "burn for burn, and bruise for bruise." By the way, this was a great improvement over the unregulated revenge of the surrounding nations. But this radical love of Jesus is way beyond such reasonable policies and practices that were common in the first century. Love your enemies! Always doing good, speaking words of blessing and continually praying on their behalf. And then Jesus goes on to illustrate the radical and outrageous nature of this love through three examples of unnatural action.

II. Radical Love Illustrated.

First He says, **"Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also;...** (v. 29). These are difficult words to understand and even more difficult to apply. But let me say a couple of things before we dig in. First of all, Jesus is not offering a prescription to follow in every situation of abuse. This is not a formula for us. In fact, we know that because when Jesus Himself was brought before the high priest during His trial He was struck on the cheek. And you know what; He didn't give them the other cheek to hit. No, he said, "If I have spoken wrongly, bear witness of the wrong; but if rightly why do you strike me?" Jesus wanted answers. Instead of turning His cheek He said, "What did you do that for?" You see, this is not a script to be followed. These are principles of the Kingdom. They're given to guard our hearts and govern our actions and our responses.

Secondly, Jesus is not calling us to a sort of holy passivity. We must apply this radical love with biblical wisdom and Godly council. For a lot of years I used this text to justify my own passivity. Some of us because of wounds in the past are often unable to respond or find a voice in the midst of hostilities. But Jesus is not calling us to a kind of passive, paralysis when the pressure is on. This is not what Jesus is teaching here. And if you are in a relationship of abuse then by all means take action to protect yourself. Then seek out the counsel and prayers of Godly men and women to help you decide what's next. Passivity and paralysis are not qualities of the Kingdom of God. In fact, Jesus is requiring a kind of aggressive love that takes action in the face of the most difficult of circumstances.

The apostle Paul helps us with this principle in Romans 12 where he says, **"Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord. But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; ... Do not overcome evil by evil, but overcome evil with good"** (Rom 12:17-21).

So while each situation will require applied wisdom and discernment, this principle should guide our steps. Don't take revenge. Leave that to the Lord, that's His job. Wherever possible live at peace and seek to do good to those who do you harm. This is not holy passivity. This is an aggressive activity of divine love. Rudolph Stier put it this way, "This must be your retaliation—love and truth for hatred and lies."

And then Jesus says, **"...whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either."** The outer coat or cloak was your all-purpose garment that doubled as a robe by day and a blanket by night. Jesus says if someone robs you of your cloak and is still in need then go ahead and give him the shirt off your back. Now this also needs to be applied with wisdom. When I was

about 12 years old I watched a guy carry my neighbor's TV set right out the door. I just figured he was the TV repair man or something. I almost went over and gave him a hand. Don't ever hire me as your security guard! But if someone is robbing your house don't help him out. When he takes your TV don't run after him and say, "hey could you use a DVD player?" Call the police. But here's the principle. Understand that those who steal are in need. So then seek ways to do good, to help provide shelter and clothing for those who are desperate. Jesus is saying, "don't return their evil of robbery with the greater evil of your own uncaring heart."

Then in verse 30 it says, **"Give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back."** This speaks of that quality of generosity that we looked at last week. Prov. 19:17 says, **"He who is gracious to a poor man lends to the Lord, and he will repay him for his good deed."** God says hold your possessions lightly, give to those in need and I'll be faithful to care for you. By the way, in a few weeks we're going to begin a food collection in our lobby so every week we can participate in giving to those in need in our own community. So whether you're slapped, robbed, or taken advantage of, love your enemies, do good, bless them, and intercede on their behalf.

In other words, **"Treat others (even your enemies) the same way you want them to treat you."** Or as the King James says: **"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."** In a sense this so called "Golden Rule" is to act as a guiding principle in applying this Radical Love.

Now I understand that it's not always possible to implement this command. Some relationships are so damaged that there is absolutely nothing we can do except to pray. That's why Paul said "as far as it depends on you," live at peace with all men. Sometimes we've truly done all we can. It's no longer dependent on us, and we need to release it to the Lord.

But just think for a minute about what it would mean if we really practiced this command on those who make our list of enemies. If we treated our enemies with the respect that we so desperately long for ourselves. If we decided to dispense the forgiveness that we desire in our own hearts. If we initiated conversations that were soaked in the words of kindness and grace that we so long to hear from others. What a difference that would make in our families, in our work places, even in our Church. What do you think would happen if we at CPC were known for this kind of Radical Kingdom love in our community, loving our enemies, returning evil with good, keeping our hearts softened to care for those in need. Actively treating others the way we desire others to treat us.

But this kind of love doesn't come out of our nature or instincts. In fact Jesus says that the natural, self serving love of the world can't even be compared to the radical

quality of this Kingdom principle.

III. Radical Love Compared.

"If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners in order to receive back the same amount" (vv. 32–34).

Jesus asks this questions three times: "What credit is that to you?" If you just love those who love you, or do good to those who will return the favor or lend to those who will give you something back, what's the big deal there? That's nothing. Even sinners do that. That kind of love is rooted in the ethics of the world, not the priorities of the Kingdom of God. This kingdom principle is not a kind of "you scratch my back I'll scratch yours." That's the world's game. As followers of Christ and subjects of the King, we are to love generously and graciously. And we're to do it without expecting anything in return, without waiting for an outcome. We're to love with no strings attached!

Let's face it, this is where it gets tough, doesn't it? I like to think of myself as a loving, grace filled follower of Christ. And I can pull it off when I surround myself with people just like me. People who hold my values, speak my language. We all feel good around people like that because they give us something in return. They love us back. They affirm us. And you know what, that's a great thing.

But we should be clear; that's not the radical love of the Kingdom that Jesus is talking about here. The King wants to know how I respond when my neighbor blocks my driveway for the third time this week. He wants to know how you're going to handle it when the office manager uses your report to promote his own cause, or when a difficult family member speaks those same hurtful words again. Suddenly we're not feeling the love, are we? That's when this principle is put to the test. You see, it's one thing to do good and care for those who are likely to give something in return. It's quite another thing to respond in grace and kindness when there's absolutely nothing in it for me.

But Jesus makes it clear; these radical words of the Kingdom are to govern every aspect of our lives, touching even the most difficult relationships. Commanding us to love others even when there's no possibility of getting something in return.

I read an interesting article this week about a new diet trend. Are you interested in being a vegetarian, but concerned that you might not be able to adjust? Not to worry...you can become a *flexitarian*. As vegetarianism gains in popularity and increases its market niche, a variation has developed. The

flexitarian is a person who eats primarily vegetables, but also indulges occasionally with meat. The designation fits people like 28-year-old Christy Pugh, who says, "I usually eat vegetarian. But I really like sausage... I just have a hard time being 100% committed."

But the children of God and the subjects of the King don't get to be *flexitarians* when it comes to this principle of radical love. We don't have the right to pick and choose who it is we're going to do good to. As Jesus says in Matthew's gospel, we don't get to "love our neighbors and hate our enemies". And we don't get to harden our hearts or withhold our love from those who can't give us something in return.

So Jesus says it again in verse 35. **"But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, (then He adds) expecting nothing in return;..."** Are we ever going to do this perfectly? Not this side of eternity. Is there grace when we fail? Absolutely His grace abounds to all. But this is our mandate, and as followers of Christ the King we are to be 100% committed to see this radical quality of love guiding every aspect of our lives. We can't do it on our own, so we ask the Spirit to root out our bitterness, heal our wounds, and to teach us how to dispense the love of Christ even to our worst enemies. But even though we're to expect nothing in return this Radical Kingdom Love has a huge reward.

IV. Radical Love Rewarded.

"...and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (vv. 35b–36).

Do you see it? When we love our enemies, we start to look like our Father. When we do good to those who hate us, bless those who curse us, and pray for those who mistreat us, we show the family likeness proving that we truly are sons of the Most High. We become like a living audiovisual of His likeness, for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men and women just like us. That is what we celebrate this Holy week. The fact that Christ was beaten and abused, spit upon and stretched out to die on a cross for ungrateful and evil men like ourselves. So this section ends with these tender but powerful words, "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful." And as we respond with a heart of mercy to an undeserving world we display the likeness of our King. The apostle Paul put it this way. **"Live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God"** (Eph. 5:2). Love your enemies, continually doing good, blessing

and praying on their behalf.

Kent Hughes tells this story of Radical Kingdom Love. After the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989, no person in all of East Germany was more despised than the former Communist dictator Erich Honecher. He had been stripped of all his offices. Even the Communist Party rejected him. Kicked out of his villa, the new government refused him and his wife new housing. The Honechers were homeless and destitute.

Enter pastor Uwe Holmer, director of a Christian help center north of Berlin. Made aware of the Honecher's situation, Pastor Holmer felt it would be wrong to give them a room that was meant for even needier people. So the pastor and his family decided to take the former dictator into their own home.

Erich Honecher's wife, Margo, had ruled the East German educational system for 26 years. Eight of Pastor Holmer's ten children had been turned down for higher education due to Mrs. Honecher's policies, which discriminated against Christians. Now the Holmers were caring for their personal enemy—the most hated man in all of Germany. This was so unnatural, so unconventional, so supernaturally sublime. So much like Christ.

You see, by the grace of God the Holmers loved their enemies, did them good, blessed them and prayed for them. They turned the other cheek. They gave their enemies their coat (their own home). They did for the Honechers what they would have wished the Honechers would do for them.

So today we celebrate the coming of the King. What a great season this is. Next week we'll all be outside celebrating the coming of His Kingdom rule and reign. We'll be singing about the power of the resurrected Christ to forgive our sins and claim us as His own. I've already picked out the songs. That's a great thing! But in all of the celebration let's not forget that when the King comes He brings the values of the Kingdom and He speaks into our lives calling us to follow after Him in this radical Kingdom love. May we have ears to hear and then obey the voice of the King this morning. Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. And by this Radical Kingdom, may we show ourselves to be sons and daughters of the Most High.

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