

LOVE CHANGES EVERYTHING
[written in oral form]

Luke 6:27-36; John 13:34
Called to Love

September 24, 2023
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This is my last sermon.
So, this is my last chance to say what I haven't said yet.

Do not worry. This will not be a data dump.
I have preached over 1,000 sermons.
I think I said what I can, so this will be a bit of a review.

I chose today's passages, in part, because of the peace message.
The International Day of Peace was Thursday, Sept. 21.

Also, nearly 30 years ago, I became a Mennonite mostly because of the church's peace stance.
I soon discovered that the stance was a bit wobbly, but nevertheless, the value and claim were there.

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The Luke text has the inserted title of "Love for Enemies."  
We admire this message yet struggle to follow it.  
If it is too idealistic, then why did Jesus say this?  
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Moreover, there is more to this than pacifism.

Jesus taught how to have a whole, healthy existence, which is God's way for us. The essence of God's way is Love!

If we cannot embrace the way of Love, then how can we embrace God / be in a relationship with God who is love?

Yet, do we make forgiveness, grace, and love the priority in our lives?  
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So, it makes sense how Jesus began in verse 27,  
"BUT I say to you **That Listen**, Love your enemies,..."

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For the life of me, I do not know how someone can be in the military and have a love for the enemy. ???

Enemies can be those who have hurt or abused us, people we do not like and are afraid of.

In world politics, enemies are often created. People of the opposing country are demonized.

I once asked a former soldier, "Why did you call them Bad guys." The sober, honest answer was, "So we can kill them."

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Hate and anger are deeply connected with an enemy.

Regardless how we acquired the enemy, the path to healing, to ending the enemy status is to forgive them.

The path to being free from fear and anger is forgiveness.

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Last Sunday, I preached in Matins on forgiveness. The text was about forgiving 7 times 70, meaning always.

I noted too often both parties cannot or will not participate in the forgiving / healing process. Yet one side can still forgive,.. and **needs** to in order to be free from toxic thoughts and feelings.

Anger, resentment, hate, and fear are destructive.

Holding onto those sentiments will tear a person up.

That is not a holy, healthy way to be.

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Jesus explained how to release those negative thoughts and feelings in verses 27 & 28.

This is how to forgive on your own.

He said, the way to be free of an enemy is to do good things for them and to bless them. Pray for their well being.

Doing that changes how we regard them, it removes the anger and fear. This allows personal healing and wholeness.

This does not mean you have to be friends or associate with the person who was once your enemy.

It is simply the path of love and personal healing.

Oh, and this method works for forgiving oneself.

Say and do nice things for yourself.

It will change who you are. It really works.

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The passage continues with more essential lessons on holy, healthy living from Jesus.

Next is "turn the other cheek."

This is about a personal assault, and not so much about the physical act.

I do not think this technique would work if a gun is involved.

It is Not the slap. It is about the insult / the assault.

I like Walter Wink's explanation.

He said that presenting the other check is an act of defiance, demanding respect and rejecting intimidation.

This advice and the ones that follow are ways to avoid being a victim, refusing to be devalued. Feeling diminished and devalued are Not healthy ways to be.

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Jesus then said that if someone steals from you, then freely release it and even give them more than what they stole.

The key to understanding this reaction to theft is to Not emphasize the importance of your possessions.

Clinging onto things, including money, really makes a person weak and vulnerable. The life-giving, the spirit lifting way of being is trusting in God and love, and Not possessions.

If a thief takes what is worthless, then nothing is lost and there is no victim.

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An aside, I have frequently heard in churches that “We want to be more spiritual.” Every time I hear that, I want to laugh.

Being more spiritual is simple.

Simply get rid of everything you have, including your money.

Simple.

To be sure, the solution is NOT poverty. Not at all.

It is about letting go of possessions and valuing what is truly important. Which are loving relationships with all people and creation, and this includes with God.

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Verse 31 is the Golden Rule.

“Do to others as you would have them do to you.”

Sounds easy, but it is NOT.

Applying the Golden rule can be difficult.

The Golden Rule has to be translated for every situation.

How you want to be treated may be different than how I prefer to be treated.

For example, I usually appreciate a direct approach. I’ve found that I can grow and learn better when I am confronted and challenged.

Yet, there is a caveat to that which I’ll mention later.

One confrontation I experienced at university was not desirable.

I was finishing my undergraduate work at the O S U.

I did two years in a year and a half.

I was exhausted and wondering maybe if it was enough. I thought, Maybe I do not need to go to seminary.

"I was getting pretty smart." 😊

One of my last classes was Renaissance history.

The prof's explanation of communion was very different from my Sunday School theology.

So, I questioned him. Big mistake.

He went to the chalk board, remember chalk boards?

He wrote the text in Greek, hammering the chalk on each word as he told me what it meant. [ ]

Ouch.

I did not question him again.

However, I learned two things from that.

One, my interpretation was wrong, and two, I definitely needed to go to seminary.

I muttered to myself, "I am going to study Greek so that I will not be humiliated again like this."

Anyway, confrontation can cause me to rethink my position.

And so, I used to think that was the best technique for helping people to improve.

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It took me a while to learn that not everyone appreciates that approach,.....and it is not effective for anything of significance.

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I do value "stirring the water" and using questions to get people to consider / to ponder another way.

I think doing that is okay. It is gentle and it is for tweaking small things, that's all.

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Paul was right in Romans 14 when he basically said, "Do Not sweat the little details."

Altering or changing doctrine is not significant.

Do you think God really cares if you reject trinity doctrine or a certain perspective on communion? ????

What is important and essential is love, and many people need help with learning to love....and lots of people simply need to be loved.

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Nevertheless, sometimes confrontation is beneficial.

Such as the demonstrations supporting the LGBTQ community.

Doing so **is a statement**. It is informing people about the strong support and affirmation.

The demonstration will not, Will Not, change those who are homophobic and ignorant.

Demonstrations are to inform.

They rarely cause change.

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If you have not guessed by now.

This sermon is about change/transformation.

That was what Jesus was teaching.
Transforming how we regard enemies and those who assault us.
It is about how to live holy and healthy lives with self and all others.

As I said earlier, the Golden Rule has to be translated.
We must consider the desired / the ideal outcome, and to do that requires LOVE. This is my caveat.

When interacting with others / when applying the Golden Rule, it is helpful to remember and ask ourselves—Is love leading the way and will love be enhanced by my actions?
This love is a divine, healing, and redeeming love.

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As you know, I have a passion for peace and justice.

There was a time when in my zeal to change people's views, I hurt the relationship. I have previously shared my regrets.

I did care for them, but I was convinced that their views, resulting in how they would vote, would be destructive / hurtful to others.  
I thought I was stuck in a dilemma—either upset them or let others be hurt.

It was not a dilemma.

Throwing facts, articles, and research at someone will rarely, if ever, change their ideology or position.

My premise was wrong.  
Moreover, my actions showed that I loved my opinion / my political views more than I loved them and our relationship.  
I regret that.

Fortunately, my friends and relatives have been gracious.

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If love is not leading the way, if love is not in the forefront,
Then God is in the background.

WE are called to love / to be as Christ and to help connect people to God / to love.

We do not have to look far to see that the world is in desperate need of love, including our planet.

I think the best way to help change things for the better is to share **our** love and to live our love.

Share and do what you love, such as for peace or justice, or for art, or whatever.
Share your love for others, including those with different identities and desires.
Show your love to those who do not understand.

Love is transformative.

Share your love.

Love is healing and redeeming. God is love.

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And finally, I want to say from my heart that I have found this church to be very loving and gracious.

Thank you

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God calls us to God / to love.

So, may the church be a place for losers to celebrate,

For the marginalized and persecuted to be welcomed.

For the hopeless to find hope,

For the weak to become champions

For the lonely to find friendship and warmth

And for the hurting and empty to find love.

A new world can happen, and is happening by the love and grace of God through you and me.