



*Rev Chris Taylor - 2-24-19*  
*Kingdom Living*

Being like Jesus isn't easy. I'm not talking about being a martyr or being the world's savior. That job is taken. I'm talking about living the Kingdom kind-of-life that Jesus embodied – a life lived for God and others; a life that reflects God's will and nature. That it is hard and runs contrary, at times, to our own inclinations. Nowhere is that seen more clearly than in our second lesson this morning.

Luke 6:27-38

This text is part of Jesus' Sermon on the Plain; Luke's much briefer version of Matthew's Sermon on the Mount. What both offer is a glimpse of life in God's Kingdom: that space where God abides; that realm where God's will is fully realized. This is the Kingdom that Jesus proclaimed; the Kingdom that broke into this world with his arrival and that is now accessible to us through him. And, it is there, in that Kingdom, that we find the kind of life that God wants for us; there that we find that happiness, that peace, that we talked about last week.

What does it look like? Look at Jesus. Look at the kind of life he lived. Listen to what he taught. Do that, and what becomes increasingly clear is that if we are going to follow Jesus, then we are going to have to make some changes. We are going to have to choose again and again this path that Jesus lays out before us; a path that often takes us places where we would rather not go.

Our text is a prime example. "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. [And a few verses later] 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" (Luke 6:27-28, 37-38).

This may be the hardest message in all of scripture. Read it and we begin to understand what Jesus meant when he said that if we want to be his followers then we need to take up a cross (Lk 14:27; Mt 10:39). He was talking about dying to ourselves; dying to what we'd like to do or feel inclined to do in order to follow him. There is a kind of death to self in making the choice to love our enemies.

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We can be talking here about something as big as forgiving the person who abused us as a child – an issue the Catholic Church has been wrestling with this past week in that conference on

clergy abuse in Rome. Or it can be something as seemingly inconsequential as an annoying phone call. The challenge, in both cases, is the same.

This past week a guy called and told me he was returning my call. I asked him who he was but he wouldn't tell me. That was my first clue that his wasn't going to go well. Instead he told me I had just called him two minutes before. Now I know that I hadn't called him. My phone had been sitting on my desk untouched for the past hour. But this guy wasn't buying it. He kept calling me "Dude" which I really dislike. He acted like I just wasn't man enough to fess up to what I had done – even more annoying. When I asked him what number had called, sure enough it was mine (which explained why he was so adamant), and it was at that point that I realized I was never going to convince him it wasn't me. I acknowledged that was indeed my number and we pretty much ended it there, but not without another reference from him about my manhood.

After we hung up I looked on line and discovered there is an app that enables someone to disguise their caller id by using a different number. It's called spoofing, and apparently it is very popular with marketers who want people to believe they are receiving a local call. Someone or some company had apparently spoofed my number.

But what I want to get at here is just how irritated I was. Trust me, I was not loving this guy; and when I hung up my thoughts towards him were not kind. The irony, what makes this so striking, is that the call came right when I was working on this message. I was right in the middle of meditating on Jesus' challenge to love and do good and bless, and never, ever judge. And what did I do? I did exactly what Jesus said I shouldn't. Discouraging!

As I thought about it however, it occurred to me that maybe that irritation is just part of being human. We are never going to be perfect on this side of heaven, and the way we first react to pretty much anything is something we don't get to control. I'm guessing that even Mother Theresa got ticked off from time to time. And if that's the case (and I think it is), then what really defines us as Christians isn't our initial reaction. No, what defines us is what we do next. That's where our faith should make a difference.

So what happens when someone cuts us off on 28? We feel the same surge of anger that anyone else would feel. The question is: what do we do after that? Do we give into our feelings and give them a blast with our horn or maybe offer some choice words? What we hope for, what we pray for, is that it's at that point that our faith kicks in – at that point that we make a conscious choice not to be driven by our anger but to be shaped instead by Christ, and Christ's will.

This is why coming together in worship each week is so important. It is a way of reconnecting with what matters most in our lives. It's why the spiritual disciplines like prayer and study need to be a regular part of our lives. It is through these disciplines that we open our lives to God so that God can begin to reshape us from the inside out. It may not change our first reaction, but by God's grace and by the power of God's Spirit at work within, hopefully it will change what happens next.

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Consider Joseph in our first lesson. He didn't start out well. His father's favorite, he was arrogant and spoiled. He had zero capacity for empathy. He couldn't begin to understand what it was like for his older brothers to see their father lavish his favor upon his youngest son. Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery. It was better than murder which was their first inclination. He was carried off into a distant and unfamiliar land. He spent years as a slave. He spent years in prison – the result of an unjust charge. So clearly, if anyone had good reason to hold a grudge, it was Joseph.

Years later Joseph had the chance to wreak his vengeance, but what he showed instead was an uncommon grace. He chose to forgive. He chose to embrace and love these same brothers who had tried to destroy him. What happened? Joseph had changed.

The younger Joseph would have would have lashed out in fury. He would have turned to his father and asked him to crush his brothers. But that's not the Joseph we find at the end. Something had happened to him. There when his life seemed to have bottomed out, there in prison when he had no hope of ever being delivered, he turned to God. He saw God at work and experienced God's faithfulness and goodness. He opened his life to God, and God did God's transforming work so that years later, at that critical moment when he held his brother's fate in his hands, he chose to see what they had done not through the eyes of a betrayed young man, but in the light of God's own presence and care: "what you intended for evil," he said, "God has used for good."

So let me ask you, do you think Joseph would have been happier if he had held onto his grudge and used that final encounter to crush his brothers? No one would have blamed him if he had. Justice was on his side. But I don't think he would have been happier. Just the opposite. I think holding on to that grudge and following through with it would only have pumped more and more poison into his life. It would have drawn him deeper and deeper into some dark abyss. It would have destroyed him.

What Joseph found instead was the way of the Kingdom. He found the way of love and of forgiveness. He found the way, ultimately, of peace and lasting happiness – the same way to which Jesus invites us here and now. It is the way to life itself.

There is nothing easy, nothing natural about the instructions we find in the pages of Scripture. They require a long obedience in the same direction. They require the same discipline, the same level of commitment of anything else that is truly worthwhile in this life. Are we willing to commit to the journey? Are we willing to choose Jesus and then keep making the choice to follow him?