

Series C: Epiphany 7—Love Your Enemies

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The text that serves as the focus for our sermon for today is the Gospel reading just read, especially these words of Jesus: **“Love your enemies.... Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful”** (Lk 6:27, 36).

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Jesus has just come down off a mountain where He was praying, with the Twelve whom He called up to him. As He comes down, a massive crowd joins Him on the plain. There, Jesus teaches them what they are to do, saying, **“Love your enemies”** (Lk 6:27). We know this verse so well that it does not shock us. Love our enemies. We know that. But what does it truly mean to so do? Jesus expands on this, saying, **“Do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you”** (Lk 6:27-28). Love, do good, bless, pray. Four imperatives which carry all the weight. How then shall we understand these?

If we understand these as the world does, then we end up in a fine mess indeed. Pray? For the world, this means simply to send good thoughts. Why would one send good thoughts to someone who abuses them? Bless? For the world this means to speak well of someone or something. How can one speak well of one who curses them? Do good? Ok, we may agree on what this means, but how can we do good to those who mean evil against us? And love? Here is potentially the greatest divide. The world defines love as acceptance. “Love wins” was the 2015 motto of the Gay rights movement. For the world, to love means to accept and to love unconditionally means to accept unconditionally. Thus, to love our enemies would mean to accept our enemies and their beliefs, teachings, and practices no matter what. Is this truly what this means? Can we as Christians go along with these definitions the world gives, especially the last one?

By no means! If we say that love is acceptance, then we strip God’s word of any authority that it has. The world would say to love homosexuals by accepting them as they are and let them do whatever they want. The world would say to love women means to allow them to have abortions at any time during their pregnancies. The world would say to love those with gender identity disorder means to let them mutilate themselves and take drugs to allow them to pretend to be the gender they think they are as opposed to being the gender God created them as. And

the world would say to love you means to allow you to continue in your sinful ways. We all have broken God’s commandments. We all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. It’s easy to point to the big sins in our society and think that we’re good because we don’t commit *those* sins. But the fact of the matter is that we still sin. It might be lack of church attendance, lack of calling on God in every trouble, praying, praising, and giving thanks. It might be disrespect for our parents, our children, our government. It might be sexual immorality or hatred, gossiping or laziness, coveting what our neighbor has. It might be outright denial that the One True God is God and Lord over all, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. All these sins, from the seemingly big ones to the seemingly small ones, are us acting against God and thus, we are his enemies, as St. Paul says to the Romans, and thus we fall under His condemning law and its judgement, namely eternal death and damnation.

Yet Jesus says, **“Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful”** (Lk 6:36). God is merciful. How can God, who demands perfection, show mercy to those who are his enemies, who are not perfect and constantly break his will? Just as Jesus commands us to love our enemies, so did God. He loved us that He sent His Son to suffer and die for us. These things that Jesus commands us to do, He Himself did. He gave to those who begged of Him (Luke 17:11-19) and those who took from Him (Luke 8:43-48). Christ was beaten and yet did not retaliate (Jn 19:1-2) and was stripped fully of his clothing (Jn 19:23-24). He prayed for those who abused Him (Lk 24:34). All this He did for you. And He blessed you in His death while we, in our sin, curse God. And He did good for you, who, in our unbelief hate God. And He loved you, who, in your sin, were His enemy. Paul writes to the Romans, **“For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life”** (Ro 5:10). You were God’s enemy, and yet He sent Christ to suffer and die for you, so that you may be reconciled to God, having full atonement for your sins. God made full atonement for the sin of homosexuality. God made full atonement for the abortion. God made full atonement for the person who believes they are transgendered. And God made full atonement for your sins. Whoever repents of their sins to God has the certainty of the full forgiveness of sins due to Christ having atoned for them. And Christ was raised on the third day so that you may be justified, so that you may

be reconciled, so that you may have the certainty of the salvation for eternal life.

And now that your sins have been atoned for and you have been justified before God, we now see that we are called to live in Christ doing to our neighbors just as he did for us. Just as God gave to those who beg and did not demand from those who took from Him, so should we. Just as He did not retaliate and offered fully of His possessions, so should we. Just as God prays for us who abuse Him, blesses us who curse Him, does good to us who hate Him, so likewise should we do to those around us.

And as He loved us, His enemies, so also are we to love our enemies. This doesn't mean that we accept their sinfulness. For that is not what God did. If God just accepted our sinfulness, then we would be lost and condemned. But instead He sent His Son to denounce our sins, call us to walk in accordance to the new life that we have, and call others to do the same. So likewise, we are called to denounce people's sins and call them to walk in the new life available to them in Christ Jesus. We not only denounce the sin of the person actively practicing homosexuality, but also of the people who are leading them into sin like so many so-called church bodies and our mainstream media are doing today. We not only denounce the sin of the person who has had an abortion, but also of the people who are causing and encouraging girls and women to have abortions like so many doctors and politicians who are saying that it is a woman's right. We not only denounce the sin of the person who believes they are transgendered, but also of the school officials and so-called psychologists who are encouraging children and adults to go down that route. And we denounce every other sin, including our own, that we who are sinful commit. We do so because even one sin makes us an enemy of God and we are called to walk as He walked.

But wait! Does not Jesus say, "**Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven**" (Lk 6:37)? Yes, He does, but this verse must be taken in context with the surrounding verses. Our world would love use this verse to say, "You Christians, you are hypocrites! You claim to follow Christ and His teachings. Yet you judge the homosexual and the transgender and

say that they are sinful. You condemn abortion as being sinful. You are not following your own God's commandments, you hypocrites!"

Luther, in his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount gives perchance the best answer to this. Hear how Dr. Luther understands this, "You must understand this in such a way that it does not take away the right of the man in the public ministry of preaching to judge matters of doctrine as well as of life. Indeed, it is incumbent on him in his office to rebuke publicly whatever does not square with true doctrine, for the very purpose of preventing sects from coming in and taking hold. When he sees that life is wrong, he must likewise denounce it and resist it. He is put there to oversee this, and he will have to give account of it (Heb. 13:17). In fact, whenever any Christian sees his neighbor doing wrong, he has the duty of admonishing him and restraining him, which is impossible without judging and passing judgment. But this is all done on the basis of an office or a commission, which Christ, is not discussing here, as we have said often enough. What is forbidden is that everyone may go ahead on the basis of his own ideas and make a doctrine and spirit of his own, imagining that he is to be Master Smart Aleck, who is supposed to correct everybody and to criticize him, though he has no commission to do anything of the sort. These are the people that the Lord is denouncing here. He does not want anyone to undertake or to do anything on the basis of his own ideas and without a commission, especially not the task of judging other people" (LW 21:212-13).

"Love your enemies.... Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful" (Lk 6:27, 36). These two serve as the framework for our pericope for today, which is explained in the other verses. Ultimately, it comes down to living our life as children of God as He Himself lives. We are called to walk in this way by God, showing God's love and denouncing sins in that same love, for that is the love that God has shown us, that is the mercy that He has shown to us. May God continue to strengthen you so that you may do so all the days of your life until life everlasting. Amen.

And may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.