

Genesis 45:3-11, 15

³ Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence. ⁴ Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come closer to me." And they came closer. He said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. ⁵ And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. ⁶ For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. ⁷ God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. ⁸ So it was not you who sent me here, but God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. ⁹ Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay. ¹⁰ You shall settle in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, as well as your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. ¹¹ I will provide for you there—since there are five more years of famine to come—so that you and your household, and all that you have, will not come to poverty.' ¹⁵ And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.

Luke 6:27-38

²⁷ "But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹ If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. ³⁰ Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. ³¹ Do to others as you would have them do to you. ³² "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³ If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴ If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. ³⁵ But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return.^[a] Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. ³⁶ Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. ³⁷ "Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not

condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; ³⁸ give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.”

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I don't like brussel sprouts. There. I admitted it. I feel awful for saying it, but I just don't like brussel sprouts. I've tried really hard to like them. I know I *should* like them because they are supposed to be miraculously healthy, full of antioxidants and vitamins. But I don't like them. I've tried them boiled, sautéed, shredded in salads, and in decadent casseroles dripping with butter and cheese. And I can tell you, I have done quite well in life not eating them. There are so many other wonderful options like green beans, asparagus, zucchini, broccoli, spinach. I get by just fine not eating brussel sprouts. Every once in awhile I see them in the store, and I think I should give them another chance. They are so cute, after all, such perfect miniature heads of cabbage in an appealing shade of green. Maybe I just haven't found the right recipe? No. I know I will only pretend to enjoy them. And certain members of my family won't even pretend. I will stick to the vegetables we all enjoy.


Friends, that works for vegetables. It doesn't work so well for the word of God. We like to pick and choose the verses that appeal to us, the ones that inspire us, or comfort us. We don't so much like the ones that challenge us and push us out of our comfort zones. This is one of those passages. We all tend to love the “do unto others as you would have them do unto you” part of this scripture. That is a Golden Rule we can agree on. We don't so much like the part of the passage that starts to unpack and articulate exactly what it means to live that Golden Rule. We get just a little uncomfortable when it gets to the part of loving our enemies, and turning the other cheek, and bless those who curse you, and give to everyone who begs from you.

Confronted by these challenging verses we might be inclined to ask for a substitution. I really don't like brussel sprouts, could I have the broccoli instead? Just give that part where it talks about how I'm a beloved child of God and "God will supply all my needs according to his riches in glory" (Philippians 4:19). No, really, I would prefer God leading "me beside still waters" (Psalm 23:2) today instead of hearing about loving my enemies.

Oh, but we are supposed to be uncomfortable with God's word. We are intended to wrestle with it, because it is intended to change us. And when it comes to loving our enemies. We could all use a little work. We are disciples of Christ, learning to follow his way, and this is part of it.

If you recall from last week, we are in the middle of the "sermon on the level place" and Jesus has just called us "blessed" because we are awake and aware to the truth that we are part of a movement toward the kingdom of God. We are part of the different way of life that God has called his people to live in this broken world. Jesus has called us "blessed," not because everything is perfect but because we are part of him and what he is doing here. And as Jesus continues teaching, these words that we read today, we find out just exactly what it means to be invested in kingdom living, what it looks like to have skin in the game. Jesus is teaching us how to live as his people in the middle of a hostile world. At that begins by being willing to break the rules the world has set.

Today is the 7th Sunday after Epiphany. Christmas was not that long ago. We should still have the memory of the birth of Christ fresh in our minds. The echoes of the Christmas story should still be resonating in our thoughts. Remember the baby born in the manger. Remember the angels who sang at his birth. Remember the state of the world into which he was born, where the weight of Roman rule rested heavily upon the shoulders of the people. Remember the stinky shepherds who showed up to welcome him and the magi who journeyed to honor him. Remember God made flesh to dwell among us, to save us. Remember. But know, also, that, "...Luke is not content with leaving the birth of Jesus only as an event to be remembered. What about our lives now? Is the Christ who was really born in a manger born also in us, so that we come to live in a more, compassionate way? (Charles Bugg)."



“Do to others as you would have them do to you,” Jesus said. It sounds so simple and appealing, until we begin to realize that our response to others is not predicated on how they treat us. Our response, in fact, is diametrically opposed to the way others treat us. Jesus’ response is to do good to those who do bad to us. And these words cut across the grain of the natural human response to perceived enemies or those who may curse what we value. “Do unto others as they do to us” may not be golden, but in reality, it is the rule by which many of us live our lives. We are kind to the ones who are kind to us. We are rude to the ones who are rude to us. We care for those who care for us. We strike out at those who strike out at us. That’s not who Jesus wants us to be. Jesus wants us to be kind to the ones who are kind to us, and care for the ones who care for us, of course, but even sinners do that. Jesus calls us to go a step further to be kind to the ones who are rude to us, and to care for the ones who strike out at us. And that is not how we are wired.

Consider the culture of the ancient near east, the world in which Jesus walked. In that world there was a social norm regarding the giving and receiving of gifts. You give a gift to me, I am expected to return a gift of equal value. You loan me your cloak today, I am expected to loan you my cloak tomorrow. Relationships were built on reciprocal generosity. Its not all that different today. It’s just a question of whose turn it is to buy lunch instead of whose turn it is to loan a cloak. To fail to reciprocate another’s generosity was considered an insult, a slap in the face of social etiquette. And insults were often met with insults. That is a social norm that still enslaves us today, right? When someone insults you or your loved ones or your beliefs and values on social media, how hard is it to walk away and not react?

Here, then, is the dilemma. How do we move from the natural instinct to match blow for blow and word for word? To put it another way, how do we live our lives responding with grace and kindness, instead of reacting with words or actions that seek to answer hurt with more hurt?

The answer is simpler than we can imagine and nearly impossible to live: we overcome our natural instinct for retribution or reciprocity by remembering that we are blessed – that we are awake and aware of the reality that we are already participating in God’s kingdom here and now. We have one foot “on

earth” and one foot “on earth as it is in heaven.” And so, we walk just a little bit differently in this world. Like the disciples described by Luke, we are both poor *and* truly in possession of a superabundance of all the good things of God. We can expect to be treated unjustly by the world and *still* respond as those who have received a new identity as children of God.

And the first thing we do, as children of God, is recognize we are operating under a new economy. Love isn't a finite resource that needs to be hoarded. We are standing with one foot in the streams of God's abundant love and we can draw from an inexhaustible source and spread that love to the broken world where the other foot stands. We don't have worry about whether or not we are going to run out. There will always be enough.

The second thing we do, as children of God, is look beyond labels and reputations to recognize that each person we stand across from is another child of God. We give them the benefit of the doubt and believe they are doing the best they can, and the state of their hearts and minds is not what determines the state of ours. In our hearts and minds we recognize that we have more than enough love to share, we don't have to question whether the other person is worthy or deserving of our generosity. They are a human being, created by God, worthy of love and respect. And we have love and respect in abundance. And we can give without expecting anything in return.

The third thing we do, as children of God, is break the cycle of retribution. As someone wise once said, “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth leaves the whole world blind and toothless.” We may be absolutely justified in seeking retribution from those who hurt us, but where does the cycle of hurting one another stop? According to Jesus, it stops when learn to turn the other cheek. It stops when we bless those who curse us. It stops when choose to respond to hurt by loving our enemies. It is always possible that the recipient of our love, or mercy, or forgiveness, might not reciprocate the gift. And it doesn't matter, because we don't play by those rules anymore. We love without expectation of anything in return because initiating a generous, loving action instead of retributive one may awaken in the other person a similar response. It may just be that your act of mercy to someone who doesn't deserve it models a way for

that person to choose love and break they cycle of retribution in their other relationships. That's a chain reaction that could change the world.

Friends, this is what it means to live kingdom generosity in a broken world. It is hard, it is sometimes painful, it is always costly. But it's the right thing to do. Its what Jesus would do. And when we begin to live in this world the way Jesus would live in this world, when we begin to treat people the way Jesus would treat people, we give the world and the people an opportunity to know and be transformed by the love of Jesus even as we are being transformed by the love of Jesus. We are called to love all people indiscriminately and abundantly. We are called to make room for all of them at our table. We are called to change the world in Christ's name by giving to those who ask without expecting anything in return except that we will continue to be blessed by Jesus.

Musician, speaker, author, and peacemaker, David Lamotte says: "You are changing the world whether you like it or not." That's the truth. By your actions or your inactions, you are participating on building the kingdom on earth as it is in heaven, or you are perpetuating the status quo. May we all choose love.

Alleluia! Amen.