

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Sharpening Discipleship's Focus

(Learning from the Gospel of Luke)

Love...Who? Really??

(Luke 6:27-36)

Study #7

Introduction: An unexplored category...

(I'm going to take a bit longer than normal to "set the table" for the meal from the Bible this morning.)

It has always been the case that God's people have faced opposition.

The Old Testament prophets faced opposition for speaking out in the Name of the LORD. Jesus even called Jerusalem, "***the city that kills the prophets and stones those who have been sent to her!***"¹

Jesus followed in the prophets' footsteps. He was opposed.

An old man named Simeon prophesied of Jesus' future suffering when His parents brought Him, as an infant, to the temple to dedicate Him to God. (Luke 2:34)

Then, once His ministry started around the age of thirty, He was constantly opposed, beginning with the reception He got in His hometown of Nazareth, when He announced that He was the long-promised Messiah.

Because of that claim, relatives and long-time friends tried to throw Him off the cliff on which the city was built. (Luke 4:28-30)

¹ See Luke 4:24; Luke 13:34.

Jesus predicted His own martyrdom.² And it all happened just like He said it would. He was handed over by His Jewish enemies to Romans who first scourged and then crucified Him.³

And, of course, the first followers of Jesus followed in His footsteps. They faced opposition just like Jesus had told them.⁴

Their Leader was persecuted, so were they. And we watch as that opposition appears early in the book of Acts (chapter 4) and then increases as the story unfolds.

Persecution connects the prophets, Jesus, and the disciples. God allows enemies to oppose His people.

Suffering was a part of God's plan for Jesus. (Luke 24:44-49) He also permits opponents to oppose Christians, even to this day.⁵

This morning, we continue to learn about being Jesus' disciples. The focus will be what we are to do when we are opposed.

Review...

Last Sunday we learned about a woman who loved Jesus because she knew that He had forgiven her of a debt she could have never paid.

Her gratitude for that forgiveness resulted in extreme love and devotion. (Luke 7)

It is this kind of over-the-top, expressive, totally absorbed love for Jesus to which we are called, and for the same reason.

It's gratitude for the debt Jesus paid for our forgiveness by His death on the cross. That woman stands as a model of what it looks like to love God.

² Luke 9:22, 44, 17:25, 18:31-33.

³ Luke 22:54-23:49.

⁴ Luke 6:23; 12:4-12; 21:12-19.

⁵ I gained insight into persecution, generally, from an excellent book that traces the theme from Genesis - Revelation, In the Shadow of the Cross (Glenn Penner)

Today, we'll consider the other aspect of love to which Jesus calls us, as we see it in Luke's Gospel.

About enemies...

I told you last Sunday that my messages about love grew from one to two. You may be surprised that it didn't become three.

After all, last week was all about loving God. This week, we are thinking about loving enemies. Won't next week be about us, here, loving each other?

Loving each other is really important, and I would have given that message except that I had decided at the beginning of this series to restrict myself to Luke's Gospel for our biblical material.

One of the many striking things about Luke is that there is no command in Luke for disciples to love each other.

That isn't to say that we shouldn't. By all means, we are to love each other! But since Luke's Gospel doesn't mention it, I won't, either.

In Luke's Gospel, when it comes to a call to love, Jesus tells us to love God AND to love our enemies.

And it makes sense that Luke would highlight the need to love those who oppose, because when he wrote, enemies of Jesus' disciples were everywhere. Disciples needed to know how to deal with enemies.

So, today, we'll focus on what Jesus says to them and to us about loving enemies.

You and I know are aware that persecution is a real thing around the world today. Christians are paying a steep price to be outspoken followers of Jesus in many, many places.

Here at Northwest, we often talk about the plight of the persecuted. We pray for them. We give toward their relief and support.

For these who are currently suffering, Jesus' words have immediate and intensely practical application. For us, here, it may not be quite so apparent.

It may even be hard for us to imagine the category Jesus addresses today: ENEMIES WE HAVE BECAUSE WE FOLLOW JESUS.

But, as we will see, we are every bit as much in need of hearing what Jesus said in Luke's Gospel as were those in the first century and as those are today who are facing overt persecution.

The early Christians would have been asking, "*How do we respond when we are opposed?*" Jesus answered that question here.

Today's passage unfolds like a three-act play, with each section highlighting different aspects of our response to enemies. The play ends with an encore worth waiting for.

In a word, Jesus' call to His followers is to respond with love, and in a way that is different - more radical - from the way people generally love.

As Act I begins, Jesus calls all disciples - then and now - to "*Listen up!*" ([27] "***But I say to you who hear...***")

Love Those Who Oppose (Luke 6:27-30)

DO Initiate Love Toward Your Enemies (vv. 27-28)

DO love your enemies (v. 27a)

[27] "***But I say to you who hear, love your enemies...***"

"Loving," per Judaism

In the Old Testament book of Leviticus, God called the Jews to love their neighbor. (Leviticus 19:18)

By that, they understood that they were to love their fellow Jew.

Some first century Jews believed that it was their duty to hate their enemies. I mean, who wouldn't hate their Roman oppressors?⁶

To Christians in the first century, who were living in hostile territory, constantly opposed, "**love your enemies**" may have sounded odd, harsh, cruel, AND foolish.

What Jesus said to His disciples goes beyond loving those who share our faith or our world-view. It stands firm. "**Love your enemies.**"

"Loving," per Jesus

In one memorable story, Jesus put the Leviticus command to love a neighbor on steroids and re-defined anyone we meet who is in need as a "*neighbor*."

That was the message of the parable of the Good Samaritan. Your neighbor may be friend or foe, hostile or not. Love him. Love her.

That is exactly what Jesus did when, on the cross, He said about those who were killing Him, **[Luke 23:34] "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."**

And taking his own cues from Jesus, Stephen, the first Christian martyr, prayed for those who were stoning him to death, **[Acts 7:60] "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!"**

"Loving" - all-inclusive

As Jesus' follower, when it comes to *who* we love, we are not to be selective. Everyone. Even enemies.⁷

And regarding, *how*, we have the example of what love looks like from the woman who anointed Jesus. The love with which we are to love our enemies is heartfelt, passionate, over-the-top.

That's Jesus' standard. He hasn't raised the bar impossibly high, just incomparably high. This standard of love doesn't appear in any faith system I'm aware of.

Jesus now starts to flesh out this command.

DO good to those who hate you (v. 27c)

[27c] "...do good to those who hate you..."

It is not enough to simply refrain from hostile acts against enemies. Passivity won't cut it. Jesus has in mind active, initiative-taking love.

He puts more flesh on the bones of the command.

DO bless those who curse you (v. 28a)

[28a] "bless those who curse you..."⁸

You may remember from a passage in Luke, chapter 9, that the apostles, James and John (the Sons of Thunder) wanted to call down fire from heaven to strike the Samaritans who rejected Jesus.

Jesus says here, "*No. Call down God's blessing on them.*"⁹

Jesus calls on disciples to do the opposite of what anyone would expect someone to do who is hated.

And here is the finishing touch to the command to "**love your enemies.**"

DO pray for those who are abusive to you (v. 28b)

[28b]...pray for those who are abusive to you.

⁸ See 1 Peter 3:9, where believers are told to "**give a blessing,**" where the context is clearly dealing with enemies of our faith. (see also Romans 12:14; 1 Cor 4:12)

⁹ Of course, people must know that God is just, and that He is displeased with actions that debase others. But we must allow God to do the judging and the punishing. We have been blessed to be a blessing.

⁶ The Qumran sect members reserved the right to hate their religious foes.

⁷ Persecutors are obviously in mind but may expand to all other realms. (Marshall)

There is no question that people who take advantage of others and abuse people need prayer. The persecuted Christian is to pray FOR his persecutor.

THIS is “tough love.” Not in the sense of dishing out harsh, but needed, discipline on a rebel. It’s “tough” because it works against our instinctive desire to lash out AGAINST the one causing the pain.

Praying for the one who is making your life miserable goes contrary to what seems to be right and reasonable.

Jesus wants us to know that the prayer of a suffering disciple for our tormenter is reasonable, right, AND precious in the eyes of God.

Among the most touching stories I read in the Voice of the Martyrs material are those stories about persecuted Christians who passionately pray for those who have hurt them or their loved ones.

They learned to do this from Jesus, and they are modeling this for us who are to imitate their faith.

Jesus’ call to do good and to bless and to pray for enemies runs counter to human nature AND it is a cornerstone of His ethic - and He doesn’t ease up in what He says next.

In moving through these next couple of verses, let’s be sure we, first, understand what He says. second, that we get a fix on what He means by what He says. third, consider what applying His words might look like.

DON’T Take Punitive Action Against Your Enemies (vv. 29-30)

What He SAID (vv. 29-30)

Turn the other cheek (v. 29a)

[29] Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also...

You may think that this is petty for me to bring this up (and it may be), but scholars differ on exactly what Jesus was saying, here.

Some think that what is in view is someone slapping the cheek, which is more of an insult. Others think that Jesus is picturing someone punching the jaw, where injury is at stake.¹⁰

So, slap or punch? Cheek or jaw? It doesn’t much matter.

Jesus’ point here is that when you’re on the receiving end of an attack, don’t fight back in kind. When punched, don’t retaliate with a punch. When slapped, don’t slap back. Get ready to get hit again.

Give up your clothing (v. 29b)

[29]...whoever takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic from him...

The picture here is of a theft. It may be that Jesus has in mind the dangers of first century missionary activity, when Christians were often the victims of highway robbery.

So, this isn’t that hard to understand, either. Your shirt gets taken? Offer your undershirt.

When, asked, say “Yes” (v. 30a)

[30a] Give to everyone who asks of you...

Jesus makes no reference to the legitimacy of the claim by someone who asks something of you. They ask? You give. Love must be ready to be deprived if need be.

When you unjustly lose something, let it go (v. 30b)

¹⁰ Not surprisingly, the Greek word (σπιλον) can refer to cheek or jaw. Likewise, “hits” (Greek - τυπω) can refer to a punch or to a back-handed slap.

[30b]...whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back.

Someone takes something from you by force? Don't expect or require payback.

In all of what we just read in verses 29-30, there really aren't any interpretive quagmires. Jesus' words are pretty straightforward and clear.

What isn't so clear - at least as I see it - is application. The Lord presents us with an applicational challenge. *"How are we to take these words? What are we to do with them?"*

I own books written by people I respect that provide spot-on explanations of the meaning of Jesus' words, like we just reviewed.

They then follow those explanations with, *"Of course, the teachings are unworkable..."*

I'm not saying that this morning I'm giving the definitive word on Jesus' teaching about loving our enemies. Far from it.

But I want us to do more with His words than dismiss them or explain them in a way that dulls the sharp edge of conviction.

His words are meant to be a gut punch. Let's not deflect the blow. So, listen again.

Taking a stab at what He MEANT by what He said (vv. 29-30)

[29] Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also; and whoever takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic from him either. [30] Give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back.¹¹

¹¹ It has been well observed that this ethic is given as the personal obligation of Jesus' disciple. It was not given to apply to human government.

About that ***"turning the other cheek"*** thing. The idea is, *"Don't stop being vulnerable. Forgive. Better to be wronged than to violate love."¹²*

When we love in the face of hostility, the hostile just might be won over.

And when it comes to the shirt and the undershirt? Don't hold back a blessing when you have one to give.¹³

What about possessions and rights? The thought seems to be, *"Don't cling to either personal possessions or personal rights as if they were more important than the person who has wronged you. Loving that person is the most important thing. Period."*

It's radical stuff. No doubt about it.

It's like what happens in Acts 14, near the end of what we call the First Missionary Journey. Paul and Barnabas have taken the gospel of Jesus to the cities of Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra.

They have performed miracles by God's power, have seen lives changed, and have seen lots of people come to faith in Jesus. And they have made enemies.

Those enemies caught up with them in the city of Lystra. A crowd surrounded Paul, dragged him outside the city and stoned him nearly to death.

Then, we read in Acts 14:20, ***"The next day he left with Barnabas for Derbe"*** where they preached the gospel to that city.

They knew full well that persecution could follow them. This is one of the better ***"turn the other cheek"*** stories I know of.

¹² Love is available, vulnerable, and subject to repeated abuse. Offering the other cheek is not an active pursuit of being punched. It is the natural result of loving someone who holds us in contempt. The Apostle Paul may have this in mind when addressed legal wranglings in the church of Corinth. (See 1 Corinthians 6)

¹³ Early disciples were often socially ostracized and taken advantage of, producing situations where items were taken or damaged. These factors should not stop the disciple from loving and serving.

I have wrestled with Jesus' sayings here a lot over the past couple of weeks. Honestly, I've wrestled with them for years.

I know and you know that it is possible to explain what He says here in such a way that we reduce what should be spicy, too hot to handle truth into nothing but bland mush.

We don't want to do that. So, here's what I propose.

Applying Jesus' words...

First, I propose that we admit that there are cases of abuse when it would be morally wrong to let it continue. Child abuse. Spousal abuse. Sex trafficking. Othe ugly things that shouldn't happen.

We see these things going on and we say something, we do something, take action to stop it. It's the loving thing to do.

If we're the victim of heartless abuse, we can easily argue that it is even unloving to the abuser to let it continue.

Then, let's remember that Jesus Himself objected to the unjust beating the Jewish temple guards were giving Him. (John 18)

And let's not forget that the first disciples fled Jerusalem when widespread persecution started after Stephen was stoned rather than stay. (Acts 8)

So, there's that. I don't think that saying any of this contradicts what Jesus is saying here.

Second, let's face the fact that we here are not facing the threat of persecution, which was the situation Jesus was addressing.

But...every day, you and I either meet or we hear about people with whom we strongly disagree, who get on our nerves, who offend us, or who wrong us.

We may meet these people at work or school, or in the home. We may read about them online.

Let's call these people "*enemies*." If that seems extreme, OK. But try it. Once you have categorized this person as your enemy, you have your assignment.

- Pray for the person you disagree with. Pray for the person who really gets on your nerves.
- Bless the person who offends you. To his face. In person. Or in writing.
- Do him or her good. Look for an opportunity to bring them a benefit of some sort.

Love your enemy. That's what Jesus commands and your obedience will bring a smile to His face.

And by doing this, you're doing something else.

You are readying yourself for the possible future assignment of loving someone who is hurting you just because you're following Jesus.

We don't currently have the privilege (see Philippians 1:29) of applying what Jesus says about "*loving [our] enemies*" who ARE our enemies because we follow Jesus.

So, the place to start applying what He says here is by loving other people we can call enemies. Call it, practice. Training.

We find the most immediate and compelling applications of Luke 6 on the front lines where our Christian brothers and sisters are suffering persecution.

But powerful applications are also found in the lives of Christians like us who love the one who is hard to love or who is out to get us. We apply Jesus' words here to our own personal predicaments.

We read about a sister in Christ who has forgiven the Islamic terrorists or the communist guerrillas who murdered her husband for his strong stand for Jesus.

We imitate her faith (Hebrews 13:7) when we pray for the person who holds a grudge against us, bless the neighbor who is exceptionally prickly, and do good to someone who opposes our politics.

How great will it be - if that day ever comes - when we are able to respond lovingly (like that widow did) to those who oppose us for following Jesus because we have been preparing for that day by loving those who disagree with us.

And that is the end of Act I of Jesus' teaching about loving enemies. Act II of Jesus' words is far shorter than Act I, but it carries the same punch.

Love Everyone As You Want To Be Loved (v. 31)

[31] Treat people the same way you want them to treat you.¹⁴

Some [Almost] Golden Rules

In other cultures, and in other religions, there are sayings that come close to what Jesus says here.¹⁵ None of them says, "Love!" as powerfully as Jesus does in what we call The Golden Rule.

For instance, the Jewish Rabbi, Hillel, who was a contemporary of Jesus, said, "What is hateful to you, don't do to your neighbor." He put it negatively and passively. He leaves out both grace and initiative.

Other traditions give a utilitarian purpose: "Do this to them so that they will do it back to you."¹⁶ - which leaves out sacrifice.

¹⁴ See Matthew 7:12. Not, "The way I want things to be done is the way I should do it to others" as in, "If I wish to be left alone, I should be aloof from other people." That is NOT the Golden Rule.

¹⁵ Bock lists twelve "near equivalent" statements to v. 31 from Jewish, Greek, Roman, and Chinese authors. (commentary, pp. 596-7).

¹⁶ Philo (a Jewish scholar and philosopher who was born before Jesus and died after He died), in his treatise, On the Virtues, writes, "One is called to punish the enemy with goodness." As we might put it, "Kill 'em with kindness." (Or "Always

Jesus' Golden Rule is way more than a strategy to avoid unfair treatment that you wouldn't wish on yourself.

The "Goldenness" of Jesus' Golden Rule

Jesus commands me to give the same consideration to others - friend or foe - that I would like to receive from them.¹⁷

The Gold Rule is way more than refraining from harmful acts. It's proactive, initiative-taking, self-sacrificing love.

He is describing a love here that is sensitive to others and is aware of their preferences.

What a gift of grace it is when we approach people with this prayerful mindset:
"Father, open my eyes to know how to deal with this person the way I would like to be treated if I was facing what he's facing, what she's facing."

When we do this, we bless our loved ones. We surprise and encourage our friends. We overwhelm those who oppose.

And that's Act II. Act III is also short, sweet, to the point.

Jesus now shows us that His disciples are to love in a way that is qualitatively different from the love that other people give.

Love Your Enemies In a Credit / Grace-Worthy Manner (vv. 32-34)

[32] If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you?¹⁸ ***For even sinners love those who love them. [33] And if you do***

forgive your enemies. Nothing infuriates them more.") That is the effect, but not the motive behind Jesus' command here.

¹⁷ Jesus puts the truth in the positive form. This is something nobody else seems to have done.

¹⁸ "What grace is that to you?"

*good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. [34] And 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.*¹⁹

It was in Jesus' day, and it still is the normal way to think, that we are to love and help those who would love and help us.

Well, Jesus is looking for more from disciples. Simple reciprocity won't cut it. Everybody does that.

We are to "up" our loving game, help with no strings attached, lend with no demand for repayment, give to those who would never even consider giving to us.

Don't expect to get credit from God (the word Jesus used is normally translated "grace") for lending to those from whom you can expect repayment.²⁰

Which is to say that if we do love, serve, and give to people other than those who love, serve, and give to us, God will, indeed, shower us with His grace.

The "Encore" of this play tells us that obeying Jesus when it comes to loving enemies, following the Golden Rule, and loving when love isn't expected is not only the best and most fulfilling way to live.

It is the path that leads to great reward from God.

Conclusion: Finally, Love Your Enemies...(vv. 35-36)

[35] "But love your enemies (v. 23) and do good (v. 33), and lend (v. 34), expecting nothing²¹ in return; and your reward will be

great and you will be sons of the Most High;"²² for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil people. [36] Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."

God knows your faithfulness. He sees you as you love people who are hard to love, as you love your enemies.

We do what we do because we are grateful to this God who has given us eternal life. We love Him.

This God is so gracious that He not only gives us eternal life, He also promises great reward, ruling authority, partnership in glory for those who live here in light of life there.

That's living by faith, and God loves it when we live by faith.

Part of that reward involves a special status that Jesus calls here, "sonship."

It's available to all of His children - male and female - and signifies an adult standing before Him. The title brings with it the promise of a rich inheritance in Jesus' coming kingdom.

¹⁹ I think that the best way to understand this is to say that the normal thinking was, "If I lend money to this person in his need, he'll lend money to me if I have need."

²⁰ An ancient work called Second Clement includes this: "For when they hear from us that God says, 'It is no credit to you if you love them that love you, but it is a credit to you if you love your enemies and those who hate you,' but then see that we not only do not love those who hate us, but do not even love those who love us, they laugh us to scorn, and the Name is blasphemed."

²¹ "without hoping" (Greek - *apelpizw*), often rendered "to despair." Here, the sense is to lend without expectation or hope of benefit / profit.

²² One well-respected author, commenting on verse 35, writes, "Jesus never tells us to serve for the sake of reward. To do that is no more than to exchange material selfishness for spiritual selfishness." I don't know how to square this author's thinking with Jesus' plain words about a promise of reward.