

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

The Sermon on the Plain Part 2

Sermon Reflection Notes

We were reminded by Pastor Ron that the Sermon on the Plain in the Gospel of Luke is countercultural and subversive from the way we experience the world. We imagine that we can see our life clearly and that we know how to act wisely. Whether it's our nation's foreign policy, or it's our work, or in our relationships with each other, we believe we have a capacity for knowing exactly who we are and who God is and what God wants.

But Jesus' Sermon on the Plain is a reminder that there is another reality beyond our certainty and beyond our knowing. Jesus cuts through our certainty with four abrasive imperatives in verses 27 and 28:

Love your enemies
Do good to those who hate you.
Bless those who curse you.
Pray for those who abuse you.

Jesus is not scolding us. It is not a lesson in feeling good about everybody and acting silly. It is, rather, a rich evangelical statement that there is more to life than our capacity to contain everything in our little moral categories, whereby life is reduced to a simple set of black/white, yes/no moral choices. Instead, in our baptism, we are called to know about the larger purposes of God. We are called to act in concrete ways, as if the purposes of God really do make a difference in how we live our lives.

For instance, we often give ourselves permission to be proud of our rage – to feel entitled to our anger.

Isn't it good, after all, to be angry when we see injustice and when we see people being harmed? Pastor

Ron quoted a preacher who said: "Today's idolatry is our political ideology, which induces fear and

anger, proving it is not of God." Pastor Ron also quoted Sister Helen Prejean who reflected on a culture

that believes that we must kill our enemies – a culture that believes violence is ultimately what redeems

us. "It's that part of us," she says, "that says they killed, so they deserve to die...because we so respect

life." We must kill our enemy, we've been taught. It's in our laws. We've been formed to think that

retribution of a life for a life is normal, what everyone understands and believes. Except it isn't. It isn't

how God's countercultural and radical love works.

Jesus' Sermon on the Plain is inviting us to impossible work. We cannot love this way...**on our own**. But, through our baptism, we have been raised into a new life in which the Holy Spirit moves in us and through us, calling us to love like Jesus—challenging us with radical thinking—growing us in grace and faith. God's grace makes such wild teaching work. God shows us the way of love.

Scripture

Luke 6:27-38 (NRSVUE)

²⁷ "But I say to you who are listening: Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you; ²⁸ bless those who curse you; pray for those who mistreat 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 asks of you, and if anyone takes away what is yours, do not ask for it back 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 expect to receive payment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. ³⁵ Instead, love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, for he himself 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."

Discussion Questions

1. This is not an unfamiliar scripture passage for most of us. What do you think about it? What feelings does it bring up?
2. Pastor Ron suggested that of all the seven deadly sins, wrath is the one most likely to actually be deadly. What is it about wrath (rage/anger) that draws us in? Why is it so dangerous and potentially deadly?

3. When is anger appropriate? Is it ever helpful or useful?
4. If love is a verb (*which it does function that way*), does it call us and draw us in the same way anger does? Why or why not?
5. What stories about radical forgiveness and/or loving responses toward those who have caused harm (*even unspeakable harm*) do you know? Bible stories? Life experience stories?
6. Pastor Ron said that Jesus was not suggesting passivity, this is not an invitation to quietly endure abuse. Rather it's a way of saying, I will not repay evil with evil. I will actively choose love when the world says retaliate.
What helps us actively choose love without denying our anger or using it to cause destruction?

Closing Prayer

God of new life, we understand that in our baptism we are your people and you are our God. Mostly we don't mind that arrangement. But then we hear again the sermons of Jesus and we realize once more that you do not fit into any of the categories we prefer. Lifting up the broken, forgiving those who cause harm, letting go of judgement...it all goes against so much of what we want to believe. We pray this day for your mercy and grace to transform what is brutal and greedy and fearful among us. Make us to be people of peace, people who are haunted by your larger purposes for us, for all of creation. We pray in the name of Jesus, who preached your Truth. Amen.

"It is impossible to love in this way on our own. But with God at work, the impossible becomes possible."