

February 23, 2025
Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Luke 6:27–38

LOVING THE UNLOVABLE.

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

Last Sunday in our Gospel text, we heard the beginning of Jesus' Sermon on the Plain as recorded by St. Luke. We heard Jesus pronounce **blessings** and **woes** , describing the characteristics of the **blessed** baptized believer in Christ whose salvation and eternal life in heaven is secure – versus – the **woeful** lives of all who're without Christ and are destined for eternal damnation. (cf: Luke 6:20–26)

Jesus makes it clear that by following Him, you will be hated, rejected, and abused because of His name. Perhaps, you've already experienced such resentment. If not, you will. A person who experiences such treatment might be tempted to respond in a similar manner, call it quid pro quo or tit-for-tat. That natural man has a desire to get even. But as this morning's text picks up immediately following last week's **blessing** and **woes** , Jesus commands an altogether different kind of behavior for the Christian, one totally unexpected in this world. It's a radical call to action. Not just an emotional reaction but an unnatural act of the sinful human will.

Jesus describes the life of the Christian... how the believer in Christ daily behaves and serves and loves his neighbor while living in this broken and sinful world. Not to earn you favor but because it's His good and gracious will for how you should live your life. In rapid succession, He rattles off a list of things that the child of God does for others. He exhorts you to love, do good, bless, pray, offer the other cheek, don't withhold the shirt off your back, give and don't demand things back. He is unpacking of the meaning of the Fifth Commandment, that we should fear and love God so that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body, but **help** and **support** him in **every physical need** . He sums it up with what we call the " **Golden Rule** :"

"... as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them. " (Luke 6:31)

You, dear baptized believer, your life is a precious gift from God – and in turn – He has **given you as a gift to your neighbor** so that you might love them and serve them. Let me say that again. God has **given you as a gift to your neighbor** so that you might love them and serve them.

Who is your neighbor? Your neighbor is your parents, your spouse, your children, and your extended family. Your neighbor is the people that you work with. Your neighbor is everyone sitting under this roof this morning. Your neighbor is everyone you come into contact with during your everyday life – and – Jesus has **given you to them** so that you might serve and love them.

Unfortunately, because of the sinful human nature, you and I tend to see things the opposite way. You look for ways that your neighbor can serve and love you. You look for ways to avoid being hurt or harmed by your neighbor. Or, worse yet, you look for ways of avoiding your neighbor altogether. But that's not why God placed you at this specific place and this time in history. Yes, He has given you the common sense to take care of yourself and those closest to you, but this life is not **only** about you.

Because of Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden, the sinful nature has been passed down from generation to generation and is woven into the very fiber of all mankind. (cf: Romans 5:12) Martin Luther described this sinful nature as being: ***"curved in on oneself."*** (LW 25, 294) It's what sin does. It curves us in on ourselves. Many times, the things you do, you do out of selfish ambition or conceit. (cf: Philippians 2:3–4) You serve your own desires first before looking to the needs of others. And because **all** mankind is sinful, you're not only one of the many sinners, you're also one of the many people who are sinned against.

When someone sins against you – it makes you angry. And when you're angry at someone, you believe you no longer have to love them... or that you have license to get even with them or shut them out of your life. You justify your anger because vengeance and *"doing unto others before they do unto you,"* is the way of the world. Everyone has enemies. You have enemies, and people think that **you** are **their** enemy. The devil is in the details. They sin against you and you get even by sinning back against them. You go from anger to bitterness to hardening your heart against that person. They have become your enemy and once someone becomes your enemy and you have become theirs, the devil rejoices. He has eliminated your neighborly relationship. You can no longer love one another. All you have is spite, hatred, and anger. Jesus says:

"... that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment... whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire." (Matthew 5:21–22)

In our text Jesus says

"... Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you." (Luke 6:27–28)

No, Jesus' commands are not easy – but He's clear that it's how He wants the Christian to live. Brothers and sisters in Christ, God has placed you here in this world at this place and this time to serve and love the people around you. He has given you blessings – your time, talents, treasures, abilities, and resources, each according to His measure (cf: Ephesians 4:7) to serve and love your neighbor – not only your loveable and deserving neighbor – but also your unlovable and undeserving neighbor. Even those who sin against you.

In Baptism God has made you His own child and set you apart from the sinful world. Jesus says, what good does it do if you only love the people that love you? (cf: Luke 6:32–36) Even the sinners do that. What good is it if you only do good to those who do good to you? What good is it if you lend to the people who pay you back? Even sinners do that. God has set you apart to be different. Jesus is calling you to a new kind of life, to a life of love and service to your neighbor. Even loving those that have hurt you. Even loving your enemies. Jesus says:

"³⁶ Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful." (Luke 6:36)

Of course, on this side of heaven you and I will never be able to perfectly imitate the unconditional nature of God's mercy. But that doesn't mean you shouldn't try. It's part of living that new kind of life, a life of love. This is why Jesus says:

"Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned..." (Luke 6:37)

This verse seems to have become a favorite of many people. They might not know any other Bible verses, but they know ***"Judge not, and you will not be judged."*** But what they're really saying is: *"I can do all things through a verse taken out of context."* Jesus is not referring to a legal decision rendered by a human judge, nor does He mean that Christians should never confront others with God's Law. He's referring to hypocritical judging and condemnation of a fellow believer about the speck in their eye without first examining oneself and taking the log out of your own eye. (cf: Luke 6:41–42)

Jesus doesn't want His disciples to misrepresent God who is merciful. If the Christian is judgmental or legalistic, they tarnish God's character as a God of grace. While it is true that God will indeed judge all people, He reveals Himself through Jesus and through His disciples as a God who delights in showing mercy, not in condemnation. (Just, Luke 1:1–9:50, Concordia Commentary, 295) Therefore, He calls you to be merciful and forgive others just as God the Father forgives you.

You're probably wondering how any of this is possible because it sounds impossible. The answer to that question is in verse 35 and 36. Jesus says:

"... love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil." (Luke 6:35–36)

Indeed, God is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. He's probably talking about us there because apart from Christ Jesus, you and I are ungrateful evil enemies of God. And the wages of being sinful enemies of God is eternal death and damnation. (cf: Romans 6:23) But, from before the foundation of the world God saw you dying from the wages of sin. Rather paying you your wages ***earned*** by handing you over into eternal damnation, in His rich mercy and grace, He sent His own Son, Christ Jesus into the world to be your substitute in death, to suffer the judgment and death that you deserved so that when you die a physical death, you would pass through death into eternal life. He took your sins on His sinless shoulders and carried them to the cross where He shed His precious blood, suffered, and died on your behalf and for your salvation. St. Paul explains it this way:

"... God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8)

"¹⁰ 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."
(Romans 5:10)

Love and mercy go together. It takes a merciful person to love an enemy... a loving person to give without expecting any return. That is the merciful God that you have. That is the merciful God who has you. And that One, that loving and merciful One, that crucified and risen One, the

Lord Christ Jesus, loves you and delights in you and is pleased to call you His brother and friend. His love and mercy spills over into forgiveness and generosity that overflows in abundance because it comes from God.

Jesus uses the imagery of grain poured into a vessel where it's pressed down and shaken to make room for more to overflowing, then poured into your lap. That is the God who blesses you beyond measure also sends you to serve, love, and bless your neighbor. You can't do it on your own. It's by His grace alone that enables you to love your enemy, to bless those who curse you, to pray for those who abuse you, and to do good to those who hate you.

Will you do it perfectly? Of course not. So when you fail, remember your baptismal promises, that the Lord God who is merciful still loves you, and forgives you, and then sends you out again. He is the Father of all mercies and is merciful to you and is even merciful to your neighbor through your good works and deeds – however feeble they may be. God grant that the Holy Spirit enable you to unconditionally and mercifully serve and love your neighbor, regardless of whether they are loveable or not.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.