



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. **AMEN**

A week ago, our Sunday Monday school class had this same scripture text in the Gospel of Luke. The title of the lesson was “Love your Enemies”. As Margaret and I were going through the lesson, we were shocked that neither student knew the Golden Rule. I know for me personally that was a mantra of my mother back in the 1960’s. She would often remind me of the Golden Rule starting off many a discussion with “Do unto others. . . ‘So, I guess I was surprised that neither young lady knew the Golden Rule at least not by that name.

Our text today has Jesus teaching this “rule” to those that were gathered. He starts by telling them to “love their enemies” and then some 8 verses later, he again says, “love your enemies.” The in between verses Jesus organizes into two sets of three examples. The first group says, “do good to those who hate you”, “bless those who curse you” and “pray for those who mistreat you’. Then to paraphrase the second set of three; turn the other cheek, give your coat up and give your stuff away and don’t ask for it back. The first grouping is general in nature and the second set is much more specific.

I read a great quote this week about these two sets of teachings. Tannenhill, a Bible scholar, said that Jesus used ‘forceful and imaginative language instead of legal language, because his purpose was not to provide precise rules of every occasion but to stimulate moral insight by challenging the ruts in which people move.” And I think that one of the biggest ruts we get into in our

society today is anger. And that anger does not allow us to do as Jesus says, to love our enemies.

How can we love our enemies if we are so angry that we cannot see past our own red faces as our anger boils over? Anger is a very interesting emotion. When we feel frustrated, mistreated, or defensive about something, anger is an emotion in our repertoire. Don't get me wrong anger can also serve a purpose. It can tell us when something is wrong. It can alert us to a situation that does not sit right with that little thing we call a conscience. And it can certainly motivate us to respond to a situation. It is how we respond to anger is important here.

From little on some of us have been taught to vent our anger. It is not good to hold it in while on the other hand it is also not good to shout and scream or have a tantrum. Some studies that I read this week talked about the idea that venting our anger might wire our brains to be angry more often. Wow, no one would want that. So how do we express our anger? Yup, you guessed it. Our Scripture texts today have a better answer. In our Genesis reading we hear the end of the story about Joseph and his 11 brothers. When Joseph was young, he was the favorite of his father. Anger grew among his brothers especially after he shared a dream with his brothers.

This anger among the brothers first boiled into the thought that they should kill Joseph. But instead, they seized another opportunity and sold him into slavery. They lied to their father as they told him that he was killed by a wild animal. And so, Joseph ended up a slave in Egypt. Joseph then was put in prison for a crime he did not commit and finally after years was released when the Pharaoh heard that he could interpret dreams. Joseph correctly advised the Pharaoh to store up grain because there was going to be a famine in the land and that proved to be true. Joseph became one of the powerful elite, second in command at the time the famine was in full swing.

Sometime after that the 11 brothers came to Egypt to buy some grain and they met Joseph. But they did not recognize him at first. Joseph responded to their needs rather than having them killed or sent home with no provisions. Just think of what he had gone through because of those brothers. Rejected by these brothers, forced into servitude, years in an Egyptian dungeon, exiled from his own people and his own father. All things that I know would make

most of us very, very angry. Yet Joseph responded in a different way, in a most Godly way.

Joseph had had a long time to process what had happened to him, so he did not get angry with his brothers, but rather he responded with deep compassion. He forgave his brothers. And from that forgiveness there was blessing. Not only was he reunited with those brothers but also with his father. It was not that the brother's former actions were God's will, but rather that Joseph was given the opportunity to turn his unjust situation to a life where God could work through him to help others. This example by Joseph is what God wishes for us all to do when we think we have the right to be angry at our circumstances.

In our text from Luke this morning Jesus addresses anger as well. He instructs us how to act when we are wronged or when people don't like us. He tells us to forgo vengeance and seek forgiveness. This seems preposterous and is once again not what those in attendance are expecting. Again, Jesus is turning their lives upside down. Turn the other cheek so you will get struck again? Give the shirt off your back to the one who steals your coat. Love your enemies? Can Jesus really expect us to do this. It does go against our instinct of meeting negativity with more negativity. We seem to be wired a different way than what Jesus is talking about. You just need to watch two toddlers react as they both want the same toy. Anger creeps in. And so, Jesus is wise in telling the Israelites who are listening that this is not God's way to handle anger.

Instead, we will be blessed if we can love our enemies and do good to those who hate us. In other words, give to our offenders the exact opposite of what they have given us. Golden Rule overtakes the inbred thought of an eye for an eye. A very wise man, Gandhi once said, "An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind." Isn't that a wonderful quote? And oh, how true, our society, our whole world is quite blinded by hatred. But we as Christians have the final word from Jesus that we need to break the chain of hostility. We need to sow love wherever we go.

Jesus did just that as he pardoned the criminal on the cross but more importantly, he prayed for his enemies, "Father, forgive them, they don't know what they are doing." And so, with those words, the chain of hostility is broken. Forgiveness of sins for a broken humanity. We are therefore justified with God and offered a reward of eternal life in heaven. And Jesus invites us to do the same. Break the chains of hostility whenever we are faced with

anger at someone who has done us wrong. Blessings of being freed from the anger and peace will then be given to us.

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross and David Kessler in their book, On Grief and Grieving, tells this story: Keith's 17-year-old son, Alan, was shot and killed by a gang member while walking back to his car after a basketball game. Keith and his wife Donna were paralyzed by the senseless murder of their son. To their friends, it seemed like Keith and Donna couldn't get over their grief. They were stuck in it.

Keith was consumed by the trial of the gang member who killed Alan. The jury found him guilty and sentenced him to life in prison. It seemed to bring some consolation to Keith and Donna, and they went on with their lives according to a new normal. But the absence of their son and the conclusion of the trial left a big hole in Keith's heart.

Five years later, Keith learned that the man who killed his son was up for parole. And just like that, Keith felt his world crumble under his feet. All his old anger came raging back.

Keith attended the parole hearing. It didn't last very long. The parole was quickly denied. But something happened at that hearing. The father of the shooter was also there, and at the declaration of the parole denial, he began to weep. Keith saw this aggrieved father. Another father also grieving for his son.

Keith found himself walking across the room and extending his hand to the shooter's father. He wanted to get to know this man. Something clicked between them. The two grieving fathers established a connection. And in time, something remarkable emerged. They channeled their grief into something productive. The two fathers started to help other gang members escape their situation and find a new pathway in life. They visited inner city schools and shared their common story. In short, they became instruments of peace. And in so doing, they found healing.

What a wonderful story. I wish more of the TV news stories had such a grace filled ending instead of suing municipalities, rioting in the streets and the like. Jesus is clear that we are to love our enemies, subdue our anger toward them and simply love, giving them the coat off our back. Not an easy challenge, but wouldn't the world be a better place if we all gave our best effort to do that. And so, we continue to pray that we may be agents of God's grace by showing His transforming power of divine love to all. **Amen**

