

Seventh Sunday after Epiphany February 20, 2022



Luke 6:27 "But I say to you who are willing to hear:

Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you."

St. John United Church of Christ
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Fairview Heights, IL
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*Genesis 45:3-11, 15 • Psalm 37:1-11, 39-40 •
1 Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-50 • Luke 6:27-38*

*RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP:

Where do we find you, Holy One, and how do we follow?

Find me at your table, **We'll share your food**

Find me in your resources, **We'll share your riches**

Find me in your power, **We'll share your mercy**

Find me in your pain, **We'll share your forgiveness**

Find me in your generosity,

We'll share all, and expect nothing in return

In community, seek my holiness,

We follow you in love, generosity, joy

In the world, share my desire:

We follow you in justice, mercy, peace for all.

*PRAYER OF INVOCATION:

Holy One, you are deep within our world, calling us to join you in creating abundant life for all.

Open our hearts to recognize you. Free us to trust your call and follow; Enable us to repent, and forgive, and join in your work to make "all things new".

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

*CALL TO CONFESSION:

Holy One, your call is deceptively simple:

"Do to others as you would have them do to you"

And yet we cling to self-serving ways

which separate us from your beloved creation:

You call us to turn our lives around,
to risk repentance and learn forgiveness,
to work with patience and diligence to prepare the
way for your Reign,
but we get discouraged and give up too soon.
Lord, have mercy.

You call us to be full of joyful confidence
to create community where all have enough for
abundant life,
but we burden ourselves with anxiety and fear.
Christ, have mercy.

You call us to speak out in the presence of injustice,
but too often we do not challenge words and actions
rooted in hate:
Holy One, have mercy *Silence*

*ASSURANCE OF PARDON:
Our God is good, and generous, and loving:
Trust in Jesus' promise:
"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." (*Luke 6:38*)

*GLORIA PATRI: NCH 759
**Glory to the Creator, the Christ, the Holy Spirit,
Three- in-One; as it was in the beginning, is now,
and ever shall be, world without end. Amen. Amen.**

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 37:1-11, 39-40
Don't get upset over evildoers;
 don't be jealous of those who do wrong,
² because they will fade fast, like grass;
 they will wither like green vegetables.
³ Trust the LORD and do good;
 live in the land, and farm faithfulness.
⁴ Enjoy the LORD and he will give what your heart asks.
⁵ Commit your way to the LORD! Trust him! He will act
⁶ and will make your righteousness shine like the
dawn, your justice like high noon.
⁷ Be still before the LORD, and wait for him.
Don't get upset when someone gets ahead—
 someone who invents evil schemes.
⁸ Let go of anger and leave rage behind!
 Don't get upset—it will only lead to evil.
⁹ Because evildoers will be eliminated,
but those who hope in the LORD—
 they will possess the land.
¹⁰ In just a little while the wicked won't exist!
 If you go looking around their place,
 they won't be there.

¹¹ But the weak will inherit the land;
they will enjoy a surplus of peace.

³⁹ The salvation of the righteous comes from
the LORD;
he is their refuge in times of trouble.

⁴⁰ The LORD will help them and rescue them—
rescue them from the wicked—and he will save
them because they have taken refuge in him.

GOSPEL LESSON: Luke 6:27-38

Behaving as God's children

²⁷ “But I say to you who are willing to hear: Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. ²⁸ Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who mistreat you. ²⁹ If someone slaps you on the cheek, offer the other one as well. If someone takes your coat, don't withhold your shirt either. ³⁰ Give to everyone who asks and don't demand your things back from those who take them. ³¹ Treat people in the same way that you want them to treat you.

³² “If you love those who love you, why should you be commended? Even sinners love those who love them. ³³ If you do good to those who do good to you, why should you be commended? Even sinners do that. ³⁴ If you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, why should you be commended? Even sinners lend to sinners expecting to be paid back in

full. ³⁵ Instead, love your enemies, do good, and lend expecting nothing in return. If you do, you will have a great reward. You will be acting the way children of the Most High act, for he is kind to ungrateful and wicked people. ³⁶ Be compassionate just as your Father is compassionate.

³⁹ The salvation of the righteous comes from
the LORD;
he is their refuge in times of trouble.

⁴⁰ The LORD will help them and rescue them—
rescue them from the wicked—and he will save
them because they have taken refuge in him.

This is the Word of God. It is true and can be trusted.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

MESSAGE: “Who is your enemy?”

There is no commandment of Jesus which has caused so much discussion and debate as the commandment to love our enemies. Before we can obey it we must discover what it means. In Greek there are three words for “to love”. There is *eran*, which describes passionate love, the love between two people who are intimate. There is *philein*, which describes our love for our nearest and dearest, the warm affection of the heart to our family, for example.

Neither of these two words is used in this passage of our Bible. The words used here is *agapan*, which needs a whole paragraph to translate.

Agapan describes an active feeling of benevolence towards other people; it means that no matter what others do to us we will never allow ourselves to desire anything but their highest good, and we will deliberately and of set purpose go out of our way to be good and kind to them.

So, when Jesus says to love our enemies, we cannot love them as we love our nearest and dearest. But we can see to it that, no matter what others do to us, even if they insult, ill-treat and injure us, we will seek nothing but their highest good.

This passage has in it two great facts about the Christian ethic. 1.) The Christian ethic is *positive*. It does not consist in *not doing* things but in *doing* them. Jesus gave us the Golden Rule which bids us do to others as we would have them do to us. This rule exists in many writers of many creeds in its *negative* form. Hillel, one of the great Jewish Rabbis, said "What is hateful to thee, do not to another." Philo said, "What you hate to suffer, do not do to anyone else." - Negative "golden rules". It's easy to go hide from someone who insulted you. It's another thing to go out of your way to do to that person what you would want them to do to you. The very essence

of Christian conduct is that it consists, not in refraining from bad things, but in actively doing good things.

2.) The Christian ethic is based on *the extra thing*. So often people claim to be just as good as their neighbors. Very likely they are. But the question from Jesus is, "how much *better* are you than the ordinary person?" It probably isn't hard to compare ourselves to our neighbor; it is not our neighbor who we must compare ourselves to. It is *God* with whom we must compare ourselves; and in that comparison we are all in default.

3.) You might ask, "why do we have to act differently if we are Christians?" The reason is that it makes us like God, for that is the way God acts. God sends his rain on the just and the unjust all the same. God is kind to the person who brings God joy and equally kind to the person who grieves God's heart. God's love embraces saint and sinner alike. It is that love we must copy; if we, too, seek even our enemy's highest good we will in truth be the children of God. If we have all the answers to a test, it's easy to get an A. If we don't have the answers in advance, it will be harder. It's easy to love people you like. It's much harder to love the people who seem unlovable. Are they your enemies? Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER: Beginning with a time for silent personal prayer.

Living God, you have created us as the church to be a temple of your presence. Save the church from modern idolatry that exalts people of great gifts, in sports, in the lively arts, in the political sphere, to the pedestal of an idol. May we be the humble habitation of the Spirit, where others come to know you as their God also.

How shall we be like you and your Son Jesus, heavenly Sovereign, unless you teach us kindness and a loving ethic that we may not practice, not merely respecting our enemies, but actually loving them and praying for them as Jesus did.

Today we lift up the nations of the world who are trying to prevent violence in the Ukraine area. May our prayers be fervent and persistent in this time of conflict.

We also lift up all those who are suffering, grieving, lonely, hurting, and discouraged. May your loving arms and presence be felt by them and all those on our prayer list.

We pray all these things in the name of your Son, Jesus, . . .

THE LORD'S PRAYER:

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be your name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on

earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

PRAYER RESPONSE: NCH 772 "Nothing Can Trouble"
**Nothing can trouble, nothing can frighten.
Those who seek God shall never go wanting.
Nothing can trouble, nothing can frighten.
God alone fills us.**

***BENEDICTION:**

Send us into the world, O Holy One,
Ready to witness to your generosity and forgiveness
Ready to be recognized as those who follow your
Way,
Ready to shape a world of justice, peace and joy.
Amen.

PRAYER LIST: Urban Baum, Donna Isselhard, Agnes Doctolero, David Seneczyn, Cathy Ganschinetz, Warren Neff, Lynn Hursey, Carol White, Dennis Franklin, John Biehl, Cheri Schutzenhofer, Rich Schmitt, Family of Barbara Munie.

ON ASH WEDNESDAY, March 2, we will have a service in the sanctuary at noon and another at 7 pm.