

**SERMON: "DID HE REALLY JUST SAY THAT?"**  
**TEXTS OLD TESTAMENT GENESIS 45:3-11, 15**  
**NEW TESTAMENT LUKE 6:27-42**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Comedians walk a fine line. At their best they get us to laugh at ourselves.

They can get this thinking, asking questions. They often challenge us

They challenge our assumptions. I appreciate that about them

A comedy group I enjoy is Monty Python. They were brazen enough to do a whole film based on the story of Jesus. Actually the premise is about the guy born in the manger across the street and how people choose their leaders. The film is called "The Life of Brian" and yes, I'm going to highlight a scene from that satirical work in a sermon.

Jesus is featured briefly in one scene. They show a teacher on a hillside teaching a large crowd. You hear what sounds like the Sermon on the Mount

It is not an exact quote but it is close. The camera pulls back until we are at the back of the crowd. It is hard to hear, especially with the people in the back talking and arguing amongst themselves.

Then one person way back in crowd says, "Did he say blessed are the cheesemakers?"

The people seemed puzzled until what appears to be a learned man says

"He's not being literal. He's talking about all dairy producers."

Then a person in front of them says, "he's also saying 'blessed are the Greek'"

That leads to an argument among the people in the back about, "Why the Greeks?"

And the comedy of confusion goes on from there. So about having ears to hear ... confusing peacemakers with cheesemakers or the Greek with the meek

Do we have the ears to hear Jesus? Oh, and in our case, it's not really the actual difficulty we have hearing his words like those way in the back

We have what Jesus said in print. We're watching the movie with subtitles

But do we have the ears to hear? That is the question that confronts me when we get to these verses from Luke (we hear them in Matthew too)

**But I say to you who are listening: Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you; bless those who curse you; pray for those who mistreat you. 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. Give to everyone who asks of you, and if anyone takes away what is yours, do not ask for it back again. Do to others as you would have them do to you.**

## WHY NOT?

Yes, he really just said that. He is telling us to love our enemies, to pray for those who mistreat us. He then spells it out with examples about turning the other cheek, and offering someone the shirt off your back, after they have taken your coat  
Jesus is quite clear in telling us to do this ... So why aren't we?

Might I throw out some theories on why we are not doing what Jesus tells us  
I'll try to wrap it up with a suggested step toward doing as he says  
How we might do the work of loving our neighbors, including our enemies

Ok. Now the "speak the truth in love" part of the sermon  
Can we be honest with ourselves and admit one reason we are not loving our neighbors, our enemies, like Jesus tells us to do is ... we don't want to  
We prefer to ignore this teaching, maybe pretend we didn't hear it

We might hear this and have a couple of responses  
One is the rather innocent, "I don't really have any enemies."  
This works when we think just first person singular, keep the circle small  
"I'm a nice person. I'm kind and respectful to everyone, most everyone"

The problem with that is that we minimize our impact on others  
What about the positions you take and policies you support and their impact on the trans youth who got bullied at school or on the teacher who is told what they can and cannot say about slavery or Jim Crow  
or on any of those who suffer injustice while we remain silent

Another thing we might do in hearing this is to think through who our enemies are  
We might make a mental list, we might picture someone's face

You know I like to pick the images that go on the bulletin and screen  
What if I were to risk my ministry (I'm close to retirement) and ask you to please submit pictures of your enemies, of our enemies?  
I wonder whose faces we'd scroll through during the sermon  
And if I'd still have a job after we did

But Jesus isn't asking us to make an enemies list here, is he?  
Please pay attention to who is who in these verses, pay attention to which way the hate is going ... do good to those who hate you  
He will say the same thing in other ways, bless those who curse you  
pray for those who abuse you. Again, the same direction

There is nothing in here for those who are doing the hating and cursing and abusing  
Why do you think that is? It is pretty obvious, isn't it? There is simply no room for us to be the ones doing the hating, the cursing, the abusing  
Nothing faithful about us doing any of those things. Nothing Christlike about it.

## WHO ARE THESE ENEMIES?

With this teaching, Jesus is talking to the hated, not the haters, the bullied, not the bully  
For the haters the message would be different. A simple and straightforward, stop it.  
Or maybe a question from Jesus to the hater and bully in us would be  
'What in my teaching, in my living and dying, ever gave you the idea  
that I'm in favor of hatred or prejudice or gossip or abuse?'

Challenging words here from Jesus. Are we up to that challenge?  
Did you notice how this love of enemies, of those who abuse and misuse us,  
flows into the rest of his teaching? Into what Jesus says next? This is where Luke  
has Jesus give us what we have called the Golden Rule ...  
**Do to others as you would have them do to you.**

Rather interesting (or specific place) to put that into the lesson  
Could it be because this is where the Golden Rule shows its metal?  
The Golden Rule is not limited to inside the frame of the cross-stitch on the wall  
It is applied in how we fight back against the injustices against us and around us  
We don't fight fire with fire. We know two wrongs don't make a right

That transition from being told to love our enemies, to love those who harm us,  
to treating others like we would like to be treated leads us to a 'how to'  
Jesus tells us to love our enemies, to treat others how we'd like to be treated  
and he tells us "how to" with the next section in his syllabus

He begins with the logic of doing better. Don't keep your circle so small.  
If you love those who love you, what is the credit. Might as well throw in  
some air kisses and a like on your socials. Jesus demands more from us  
and tells us ... **Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.**

Then he goes from preaching to meddling (again) and says

**Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you  
will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven;**

I've lived a blessed life, been able to travel a bit  
I've been to human rights museums in this country – The King Center in Atlanta,  
the Holocaust Museum in Washington DC, Civil Rights museums in Memphis  
and Montgomery. And around the world, the Holocaust museum in Jerusalem  
Dachau in Germany, and the Apartheid Museum in Soweto, South Africa.

I've noticed a clear and painfully obvious common thread in all those places  
All those horrific acts, the laws that 'put people in their place', the lynchings,  
the brutality, the killings ... they all start with how people talk about others  
the fiery speeches, the stereotypes, the stories that stoke fears,  
the slurs and slogans that make those people somehow 'less than human.'

## WHAT KIND OF JUDGE?

The hatred, the cursing, the abuse that Jesus tells us to respond to  
with love, with blessing, with prayers ... they start with the words we use  
the jokes we tell, the assumptions we make about someone else  
You've heard things like that, maybe you've said them, thought them

Those thoughts, those words have their roots in our judging others  
When we look down on someone, laugh at them, label them  
When we pass laws that put them in their place and pass judgment on them  
what good does that do? Doesn't it (when you back up and look at it)  
say a heck of a lot more about us than it does about them?

The first step away from doing what Jesus tells us to do, to love our enemies  
is thinking of that person or those people as enemies, judging them as such  
The first step toward doing as we are told by Jesus is to see them  
as someone Jesus loves, as someone Jesus calls us to love

Doing things Jesus' way won't help us get in that zinger or jab.  
Doing things Jesus' way won't get us more clicks on social media.  
Doing things Jesus' way won't get us feeling all smug and self-righteous  
What we will get is the opportunity to open our minds and our hearts a bit more

Any of y'all watch the talent shows on TV – American Idol, the Voice?  
I'm not one to get caught up in all that. Beth watches it and then lets me know  
of people I might like (I'm more rock n roll than pop). I remember when both shows  
first came out. They have changed a bit over the years, gotten better.

The first few seasons of American Idol began with people who didn't do so well.  
We were invited to laugh at them, cringe even. The judges laughed at them.  
They were harsh, kind of scary. Simon Cowell was more like Simon 'Scowl.'  
We laughed at people, made fun of people.  
It made for good ratings ... for a few years

The show has since gotten much better. They've dropped those awkward  
and embarrassing episodes where we laughed not with people but at people.  
And the judges have gotten nicer. Yes, they have to say "no"  
And they do offer correction and constructive criticism  
But they are now more affirming, more supportive

What kind of judge would you prefer if you were to get an audition?  
What kind of judge would you be? What kind of judge are you?  
And not just a judge on some singing show ... but when you're watching  
when you're working, when you're on the clock, when you're online  
when you're making a point, when you're making a joke.

## SUMMARY

Jesus is quite clear in challenging us to love our enemies

We don't have the excuse of saying we didn't hear what he said or that it got lost in translation. So why aren't we doing like we have been told?

We can do better. The world needs us to do better

Doesn't that start with listening to what Jesus has to say?

I've been talking to myself throughout this sermon like I do in every sermon

I need to move away from the mirror for a moment to say one last thing

This sermon has been addressed to the man in the mirror and to

what I believe is the majority in this congregation

I have to admit that I am not one of the bullied, one of the hated

I am, and I believe most of you are, are in a position to bully and belittle, a position of comfort and power. And if we're not the bullied ..

we are a part of a rather large group – the ones in the crowd who see the bullying ... and do nothing, afraid to step in or stand up

Jesus' original words were to those on the wrong end of Roman boots

He was speaking to the hated and the bullied. So a closing word for you for those of you who know that painful experience all too well

My son, Jerry and his husband Alex, live in Asheville, NC

Jerry is a licensed social worker with the Veterans Administration

His area of focus is working directly with homeless veterans

With a new administration and a flood of executive orders, they've seen lots of change at the VA. Though some exceptions are written into the orders for veterans, the effect those orders have had is in part the removal of all references to particular support for veterans who are LGTBQ

No pride references, no rainbows are to be visible. Maintenance crews came through to remove those. And not only that, staff have been encouraged to report any colleagues who may be in violation of these new anti-DEI mandates.

There is a clear tension in the workplace. Worry. Fear.

One of the chaplains, my son told me, had a great response.

She serves the VA and a church committed to welcoming LGTBQ people

She is herself LGTBQ and has been working with other staff persons

who are part of that community or who are allies. Her encouragement is this.

She tells the hated and the bullied this over and over ... "Don't let them, don't let anyone, take your joy." So, for those of you who I have so far failed to include because I was talking to myself. Let me add my voice to hers

"Don't let them, don't let anyone, take your joy."