

**Unreasonable Love**  
**Luke 6:27-38**  
**February 20, 2022**

A fellow went to the hospital to visit the partner of his firm, who had been taken strangely ill and was near death. Suddenly the dying man began to speak. "John," he said, "before I go I have got to confess some things and get your forgiveness. I want you to know that I robbed the firm of \$100,000 several years ago. I sold our secret formula to our competition, and John, I am the one who supplied your wife with the evidence that got her the divorce and cost you a small fortune. Will you forgive me?"

John murmured, "That's okay, old man. I am the one who gave you the poison."

Having heard these words, we now turn to the words of Jesus in our scripture passage. Before we read them, let us pray: Stir in us now, Holy Spirit, a willingness to hear, the desire to know the truth and the courage to follow in joyful obedience, that we may be formed by your word into women and men of faith. Amen

Luke 6:27-38.

"But to you who are listening I say: 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 one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. 30 Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. 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? Even sinners love those who love them. 33 And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. 34 And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. 35 But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

“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 and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”

The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

I know when I am going to preach a couple of months ahead of time. I look at the lectionary and choose one of the four scripture passages that are listed for that day. When I did this several months ago, I was up for a challenge and choose this passage on Jesus’ words: Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who mistreat you.

After this week, I am not feeling so brave. I approach these words of Jesus with a bit of fear and trembling. What do we do with these words as we watch the actions of Russia at the border of Ukraine? If I was a Ukrainian, how would I enact Jesus’ words? Or, would I?

Let’s bring this closer to home. Think of some battle lines that divide us today:

- Vaxxers vs. anti-vaxxers
- Maskers vs. anti-maskers
- Republicans vs. Democrats
- Liberals vs. conservatives
- Rural vs. urban

We long for peace in our world. At the end of almost every worship service we sing these words, “Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.” These words of Jesus in our scripture passage show us the way to let peace begin with us. It is not easy, but here goes....

Love your enemies. The word used here for love is *agape*. It does not mean romantic love, or liking, or even friendship. It means a whole-hearted, unreserved, unconditional desire for the well-being of the other. Let me say that again: *agape* your enemy means a whole-hearted, unreserved, unconditional desire for the well-being of the other.

There is no expectation of anything in return. There is only the well-being of the other even if you don't like that person. Jesus gives three ways to *agape* our enemies:

Do good. Bless. Pray for.

Then Jesus gets into specific examples. Turn the other cheek. Not withhold a shirt. If someone takes something from you, don't demand it back. Now keep in mind the context of these examples of Jesus. Also keep in mind, this does not mean someone lets their spouse hit them. This does not mean we are to be doormats or passive.

He is talking to slaves who are disciplined by their master. Do the unexpected. Don't be passive. Take action by turning the other cheek. Jesus is talking to Jews who are under Roman occupation. If a soldier demands your coat, do the unexpected. Take action by giving your shirt, too.

This is a culture that lived by an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, do unto others as they do to you. Jesus is flipping that completely around. Jesus is giving his audience creative, unexpected, proactive ways to love their enemy.

Why? Why do this? Why must we show this unreasonable love? Because, Jesus says, we are children of the Most High. We take on the character of God. The *agape* love God shows his children is to be practiced by us to others. And we think: Ok, I can do that. But Jesus reminds us: Yes, it is easy to do good to those who do good to you. Yes, Jesus says, it is easy to love those who love you in return. Yes, Jesus says, it is easy to love those who pay us back.

But as children of the Most High, our actions are not based on what we get in return. It means forgiveness is the very core of our faith. It means to do no harm. We do not take revenge. Our actions are based on the *agape*, unconditional love of God. We act as if the purpose of God really does make a difference in our lives.

We all have people in our lives that we struggle to love. Think about the neighbor who lets the dog bark at all hours of the night. The relative who argues with you about every issue. The person who sends you awful emails telling you everything you do wrong. The person who always borrows things from you but never returns them and claims they don't have them....and never did.

The person who used to be a friend and knows you so well that they can jab you in the most tender places. Or, maybe you are your own worst enemy. We all have the unlovable people in our lives.

But then we sing, “Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.

We are to show unreasonable love. How do I love someone I hate? Where do I start when I don’t even want to? Here is a first step: recognize that God made your enemy and loves your enemy. They may not be likable, but God loves them.

Frederick Buechner, an author and theologian, tells us how to begin: “You’re still light-years away from loving them, to be sure, but at least you see how they are human even as you are human, and that is at least a step in the right direction. It’s possible that you may even get to where you can pray for them a little...any prayer for them at all is a major breakthrough.”

I remember a time when someone hurt me, and I found it hard not to be angry. I was talking to God one day, and I thought, maybe I should give it a try. I prayed for that person – just one sentence, but I remember the peace that came over me. I can let this go. If the anger came back, I prayed for them again. And I actually began to care for their well-being. I once heard someone say, “I pray not to change the other person; I pray to change me.”

Here’s how one person found a way to deal with her enemies and show unreasonable love.

Turn to the crane at the front of your bulletin. (*Walk to the communion table.*) By the way, several people of our church took me to see the sandhill cranes in Wilcox last weekend. The cranes winter in Wilcox. And we saw thousands. I highly recommend that experience. But you better hurry, they leave in March.

Back to the crane on our cover. (*As I talk, I begin to fold an origami crane.*) Rachel Held Evans was a young woman who grew up in a very religious household. When she left home for college, she began to question her faith in Christianity. Being a wonderful writer, she began to express her thoughts and doubts on Facebook, Twitter, and wrote several books on her journey.

Because she questioned the Christianity she was taught as a child, she began to receive hate mail. She was called Jezebel (a bad woman in the Bible), a heretic, demon-possessed, satanic, and this headscratcher: Honey-Boo-Boo publicity whore and embarrassment to the church.

Not sure how to handle the hate mail, she decided to try something. It was Lent. Those of you who grew up in the church, it was and still is common to give something up for Lent. I think the most popular was giving up chocolate (at least, with the women). Rachel decided, instead of giving up something, she would take on something. She printed out all her hate mail and practiced origami with them.

She turned her hate mail into pretty birds and ships, flowers and kites. She started out with a simple swan. She was clumsy and awkward. As she did it slowly, her eyes would see the painful words on those pieces of paper.

A Lenten practice is precisely that – an act of training, a discipline to do something you're not naturally inclined to do. Gradually, healing tears began to fall, and she let her fingers pray. She did this for 40 days. She turned her anxieties into purposeful acts of creativity and healing, letting go and asking for help. Friends began to join her. One friend took colorful crayons and blocked out the most hateful words. These times turned into times of laughter at each others's attempts. "Never has 'that totally looks like a flamingo!' sounded so much like a hallelujah," said Rachel.

She began to write affirming words on the paper turned into beautiful creations – prayers of others, fruits of the spirit.

She wrote about this exercise on Facebook. The writer of one of those vile letters, who heard about her Lenten practice, emailed her an apology. In turn, our author inspired her to say apologies of her own. She reminded herself to be quicker to listen, slower to speak, more retrained in budding anger.

These hate emails turned into origami creatures "helped me to remember that I am a very real human being, living a very real life, with a very real capacity to be hurt but also to be healed, to hate but also to love and be loved, to harm but also to forgive. So too with and for my enemies."

“Something tells me that we might all be a bit more careful, a bit more gentle, if we knew how our words can travel through another’s ear and linger for a long time in their soul. What if we imagined those words sitting on one another’s kitchen tables, waiting to be reshaped? What if we knew just how much effort and time it might take to transform those ugly and heavy words into something beautiful?”

It reminds me of the Bible verse that says “they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; [their hate mail into origami creatures] nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.” (Isaiah 2:4)

Frederick Buechner said, “And then there is love for the enemy – love for the one who does not love you but mocks, threatens, and inflicts pain....This is God’s love. It conquers the world.”

Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.

So, let us stand as followers of Christ and affirm our faith together by saying The Apostle’s Creed...