

Old Testament Lesson: Genesis 45:3-11, 15:

³ Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?” But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence.

⁴ Then Joseph said to his brothers, “Come closer to me.” And they came closer. He said, “I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. ⁵ And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. ⁶ For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are five more years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. ⁷ God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. ⁸ So it was not you who sent me here, but God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. ⁹ Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, ‘Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay. ¹⁰ You shall settle in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children’s children, as well as your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. ¹¹ I will provide for you there—since there are five more years of famine to come—so that you and your household, and all that you have, will not come to poverty.’ ¹⁵ And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them, and after that, his brothers talked with him.

New Testament Lesson Luke 6:27-38:

²⁷ “But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ Give to everyone who begs from you, and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. 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? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³ If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴ If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. ³⁵ But love your enemies, do good, lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. ³⁶ Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. ³⁷ “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, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.”

Reflection:

Mahatma Gandhi was the father of an independence movement. His activism reached far beyond his homeland of India. Ideas of non-violent protesting went all over the world to unite

long-oppressed people. Gandhi inspired them to stand up for freedom and justice. Gandhi was more than an activist; he studied western traditions, including the Bible and Jesus. When asked about the topic of forgiveness, he said, "The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong." Many believe he was interpreting Jesus' teachings.

Jesus' teaching of the Golden rule, "**Do to others as you would have them do to you,**" is said by John Calvin to be the summary of the rules of fairness and impartiality. It helps us see beyond ourselves and into the life of others. It makes us imagine walking in their shoes and seeing if we would like to be treated like they have been treated. Our entire Civil Rights movement in this country is based on a call for the majority to see the hardships of the minority. MLK said that Gandhi inspired him in the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, but that type of international idea transference started way before the '60s. In the mid-1800s, women began to work together to advance their voice in government by seeking voting rights. The women's suffrage movement finally won a victory in the US in 1920 by helping pass the 19th amendment to the constitution. Be it the ability to go to a decent school or the right to vote. The Golden Rule gives those of us who experience privilege, knowingly or not, a chance to begin that change. Fairness is mainly provided by those in power and received by those not in control. How then do those who have been on the receiving end of our notion of fairness, or more particularly unfairness handle ourselves according to Jesus' teachings?

Luke writes in chapter 6 of Jesus giving his sermon on the plain. A counterpart to Matthew's sermon on the mount. Jesus had just told those listening that they would be hated, excluded, reviled, and defamed by people because of Him (v.22). Now these people, by any definition, would be considered enemies of the Jesus followers. And Jesus tells them to love their enemies. You know someone on that day said, "we are going to be hated, excluded, reviled, and defamed, and you want me to do what?"

I am not a betting man, but I would stake my Sam's Club membership that everyone here this morning has experienced hurt. Someone, somehow, did something to betray you, much like his brothers had betrayed Joseph. His older brothers, who should have protected him from outside dangers. If one pays attention to this Joseph Narrative, his brothers saw him coming from a distance, and they plotted to kill him. That would not be good (a repeat of the Cane and Abel story), but they ultimately decided to sell him. They banished him to a humiliating fate. Today we find out how the story concludes; Joseph, who had done well for himself in Pharaoh's house and therefore had power over his brothers as they came seeking food, forgives his brothers. He held all the power; he could have killed his brothers or enslaved them. His brothers should be his enemies by every metric known to his culture, our culture, or any culture. But he forgave... applying that Golden rule and forgiving them their transgressions.

Jesus would have known this story. I believe Jesus shows us his genuine ability to interpret the Scriptures. Jesus may have been interpreting this passage in Genesis, or maybe he was interpreting Proverbs 25:21 when he said to love your enemy. Listen, "If your enemies are hungry, give them bread to eat; and if they are thirsty, give them water to drink (Pr. 25:21). This sounds strangely like the behavior of how we are to treat our neighbor, who we are to **love like ourselves**. Joseph does this, and Jesus teaches this. To love someone who has hurt you is difficult. One cannot love if one cannot forgive. And I believe that is Step One of Jesus' teachings in our scripture today.

How do we forgive? Gandhi said that forgiveness is the attribute of the strong. So, I guess the question should be, how do we find the strength to forgive? The prophet Isaiah says, "God gives power to the weak and strength to the powerless (Is 40:29)" and "do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am the Lord your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand (Is 41:10)." Jesus knew all these passages because he was a scholar, a rabbi, a teacher: in other words, a master of the law. Later, Jesus himself would seek strength from God in prayer, just before he was arrested. Luke records Jesus' prayer, "'father if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet not my will but yours be done,' Then (Luke records what follows) and angel from heaven appeared to him (Jesus) and gave him strength (Lk 22:42-43)." Our strength comes from God alone. On our own, we can accomplish very little that matters. Just as Jesus did in his prayer before he was arrested, we can only find strength when we surrender to the will of God. "Not my will, but Yours be done" is what Jesus prayed. Prayer is powerful, and we seek strength through prayer, but Jesus also tells us to go further. In today's passage, Jesus says, "Be merciful, just as your father is merciful (v.36)." Matthew records the same teaching as, "Be perfect, therefore, just as your heavenly Father is perfect (Mt 5:48)."

I tried not to get too geeky in this sermon, but I had way too much fun in preparing and found a coloration that hit me so hard I had to stand up at my desk and say, "Thank you, God." The Greek word translated as "perfect" (*Teleios*) in Matthew does not have the same connotation as our understanding of perfect. Today perfection is an unattainable goal we can never achieve. The Greek understanding of *Teleios* is understood as "to grow up" or "become complete." It could be translated, "Be an adult, like your father in heaven is an adult."

Likewise, the Greek word translated as "merciful" (*oiktirmos*) is something one achieves when one becomes mature. One cannot be merciful until one becomes an adult." The idea is that a child cannot be merciful because a child has no power and is always at the mercy of someone else. Like Joseph was to his older brothers.

Remember I said there is a Step One in Jesus' teaching. To Love your enemy, we must first forgive, which we do with the strength we receive from God through the Holy Spirit. We must grow up, become complete, act like adults. And Step Two, most importantly, if we act as adults like God in heaven, we must forget. We cannot love an enemy that reminds us of a transgression. We must wipe away the memory to truly forgive and love our enemy.

How many you just said to yourself, "You want me to do what?" Jesus told us to **grow up** and **forgive**; to do that, we must forget, just like God does. Jesus, I believe, is interpreting both Isaiah (Is. 43:25) and Jeremiah (31:34) when he tells us to act like, or in more proper words, imitate God because both prophets tell us that God not only forgives us our sin but forgets them as well. This is why God's love endures all the heartache we have caused. And why I believe Jesus calls for his followers to grow up and love.

³⁷ "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, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back."

Jesus is telling those listening to GROW UP; to forgive and forget. Be perfect and merciful, not as children but as adults. He teaches us to love, as God loves. Is it hard... yes? Will we fail, repeatedly... yes? But God forgives us; this is why we worship; this is why we pray. Do unto others what you would have done to you; Grow up, become complete, gain the power of spiritual adulthood; Then show mercy as an act of love, but ultimately forget those transgressions, and genuinely love. Joseph forgave his brothers, and on the cross, Jesus will ultimately ask God to forgive his killers. Luke will record it at the end of his gospel (Lk 23:34); then, "Jesus said, "Father, **forgive them**; for they do not know what they are doing." We should appreciate what grace and mercy from God mean. Grace is a gift, undeserved, and mercy is a judgment unrendered. Ponder this as we close out this reflection with prayer,

Merciful God, thank you for the insights we find in scripture. Thank you for the teachings of Jesus and the strength you send each day as we struggle with judgment in our hearts. You know the hurt that has scarred each soul in this place today. You know how hard it is for us to forgive. Yet somehow, you forgive us, even while on the cross. Thank you for the continued blessings we receive every day through your Spirit. We ask that you help us forget the hurt, help us forget it all, just as you do with our sin. Teach us to forgive and forget, teach us how to grow up. All this and more, we pray in the name of Christ Jesus, and all of God's people said, Amen.