

Sunday, February 20, 2022

Rev. Robert W. Brown

SERMON

***What if???* Part II**

NOW WHAT?

Luke 6:27-38

PRAYER

Loving God, thank you for bringing Jesus to our world and preserving his radical teachings. Open our eyes, soften our hearts and sharpen our minds, in order that we may know you directly and deeply. Give us the courage to truly follow in the Way of Jesus, for your sake, our own sake, and the sake of the world. AMEN.

INTRODUCTION:

This week's Gospel reading is from Luke, Chapter 6, verses 27 though 38, (page ### in your pew Bibles.) This reading continues exactly from where we left off last week. These scriptures have us diving deep into Luke's version of what, can be argued, is Jesus' most famous and most important teaching. Many know this as *The Sermon on the Mount*, from Matthew's Gospel, but here, in Luke, it's often called *The Sermon on the Plain*. (Both versions are known as the *Beatitudes*, but that is an entirely different sermon.)

If you were with us last week, you may remember how Jesus declared **blessings** for the poor, hungry, grieving, and marginalized outcasts. He then went on to proclaim **woes** to the rich, well fed, happy, and admired. We wondered, what if this stark, binary comparison is true? Do you hear this as the good news of the Gospel or bad news from the mouth of Jesus?

Last week's question was, "**What if** Jesus really means what he says?" How does that affect us, the way we see the world, our priorities and the map we follow toward a truly "good life."

This week we ask, not only, "**What if**" but move onto the real question; "**If so, then now what?** If these blessings and woes are true then where does that leave us? How shall we live? Now what?

So, to answer that riveting question, this morning, Jesus continues his teaching. What we are about to read, takes, what may be for many, an abstract, existential idea and puts flesh on those bones. Here is where Jesus gives every follower of him, specific, non-negotiable instruction on how to actually live a graceful and grace-FILLED life. Can we follow Jesus in this way?

Hear this teaching of Jesus from the Gospel of Luke 6:27-38...



SCRIPTURE: Luke 6:27-38

“But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. 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. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back.

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

“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. 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. 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. 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. 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 God for the people of God.

SERMON What if??? Part II - ***NOW WHAT?***

I particularly love the first line of this reading; “But to you who are listening I say:”

I can easily imagine that, for many of us, that blessings and woes list tipped our hearts and minds in some other direction, like maybe, “Did I leave the iron on or, I wonder when the next episode of *The Gilded Age* come out, or maybe, what cold-weather seeds should I start this time of year?” Jesus knows this is a difficult message for us to hear, yet he persists. So, “to you who are listening” I implore your imagination to entertain this enchanting question: What might the world look like if we actually believed these words and followed in this Way as religiously and sternly as we follow any other law or any other life map? Not only for our own well-being but the well-being of all, for the good of all society? Can you imagine? How costly would that be? What risk does it pose? What do we have to lose? Where is the actual threat and what is the likely outcome in such a world that Jesus lays out? What might the

world look like if, through our words and actions, we taught this to our children and their children?

My grandmother, Grammy Eagan, always used to pass on her wisdom to us in the gentlest of ways. If she overheard me being mean to my sister, (let's just say that might have happened) she would take me aside, give me a jelly donut, and say, "You see how good it feels to receive kindness? "Unfair! My sister would justifiably yell out through tears, why does he get a treat when I'm the one hurt?" "Always be kind." Grammy would say, handing her a donut. "Kindness has very little to do with fairness. You just do it anyway."

Sixty years later, I'm still remembering that lesson, and trying to live that way the best I can. "Kindness has very little to do with fairness. You just do it anyway." I think her words were so deeply seeded in me because she actually lived what she taught! Her actions were so consistent with what she said. I know that for many who knew her, Grammy appeared somewhat eccentric, naive in her perpetual, ecstatic state of joy and unfettered generosity. She stood apart from what the rest of the world seemed to be about. As far as I could tell, Grammy Eagan lived in a unending state of wholesome, elegant mercy. She was the embodiment of grace.

It's not like she had an easy life. She knew the anxiety of not having enough, not being enough, not measuring up to someone else's standard. Yet, she followed a different life map that led her on the road of blessing. She was blessed with some kind of magic greater than all the betrayals, reversals and ailments she faced. I think she chose to view the world through the lens of love, humility, grace and compassion. I also think this is a choice we all have, no matter what! In its simplest and most profound form, Grammy followed "the golden rule" we all know so well. (Say it with me...) "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." We still use the King James language, and hopefully we still teach this to our children. No matter what our religious stance is, we all can agree that this is the "right" way to live. But can we - should we - actually live it? And, what if we don't? What then?

I learned something beautiful this week in studying this scripture. The ancient Greek word for "grace" is *Charis*. For some reason, many translations choose a different word than "grace". It turns out that *Charis* appears repeatedly in this passage. When Jesus talks about transactional love, saying that *even sinners do that!* the word is often translated as "credit." Listen to the difference. "If you love those who love you, what [*Charis*] have you?" Our New Revised Standard Version translates that as "What credit have you?" How different it is to understand it as "What *grace* have you?" or "what *grace* is there in that?" (Luke 6:32-4). Three times Jesus asks: "If you love those who love you, *what grace is there in that?* If you do good to those who are good to you, *what grace is there in that?* If you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, *what grace is there in that?* His point is so very clear: We are made to be grace-filled, to love gracefully, to practice *Charis* in the very image of God's *Charis*.

So, what if? What might the world look like if we actually believed these words and followed in this Way as religiously and sternly as we follow any other law? Not only for our own well-being but the well-being of all, for the good of all society? And what might the world look like if, through our words and actions, we taught this to our children and their children? Well, we might look like Grammy Eagan.

What now? Well, we can begin with her words, "If you can't say something nice about someone, don't say anything at all. Kindness has very little to do with fairness. You just do it anyway. Always be kind."

We do have a choice about how we behave in this world. Jesus is asking us to recognize that the realm of God can actually exist on this earth at this time, exactly as it is in heaven! But, that depends entirely on our ability to be at peace with one another and dispense *Charis* with abandon. We may not be able to turn the world, but we can turn ourselves. We can choose to practice this behavior, face our fear, release our tight-clenched, fearful fists, and trust, without reservation, that in God's perfect design, this is the way to behave in all our affairs. It is asking a lot.

In the 19th century Leo Tolstoy published his book, *My Religion, What I Believe*. In this remarkable manifesto he wrote,

Never do anything contrary to the law of love. If anyone takes advantage of this disposition and affronts you, bear the affront, and do not, above all, have recourse to violence.

Tolstoy actually practiced what he preached. Many were confused by his radical choice to literally follow in what he called the doctrine of Jesus, but he saw a deeper truth beyond mere religious orthodoxy. He saw eternal, critical wisdom in the words of Jesus. He threw away the life map given to him by his family and society and chose to walk an entirely different way. Tolstoy lived a life of extreme *Charis*. In doing so, he became a formative influence for Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King. We may not all have the influential clout of Leo Tolstoy, but, like Grammy Eagan, we all have lasting influence on those around us.

"What if," and "now what" are more than theoretical questions, they are a call to action, a plea to choose *Charis* in the entire sphere of our everyday lives. We, here at TriCon church, are in a unique position to practice this way of life today with one another. We can choose to live here on earth as it is in heaven. I want to challenge us, in this historic time of re-gathering, re-organizing and re-inventing to really give the way of Jesus a try, like never before. Who knows how far and wide the ripples will flow from this tiny corner in Concord Center? What we do know is that *Charis* is the Way of Jesus. Grace is the very character of the God we worship. Let's give *Charis* a chance! AMEN.