

Luke 6:27-38 ('The Sermon on the Plain')

"But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse 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 begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you. "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. 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. But love your enemies, do good, and 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. 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, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back."

The reading echoes the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 7-9). It is not difficult to understand - but very difficult to do! The call to love God, to love our neighbour and to love one another is added to with one final call, *to love our enemies*. To love those who are different from us, to love those who disagree with us, to love those who are difficult and demanding is asking too much, surely! How can we love those who undermine, belittle and demean us? How can we love those who actively seek our harm and maybe our destruction? Jesus is very practical and pragmatic in his examples. Whatever we feel, our actions should do them good. "Love is not a victim of our emotions but a servant of our will" (*John Stott*). Our attitude should be one of blessing not cursing, of prayer not provocation. Instead of retaliation, vulnerability; where exploited be generous in response; let loans become gifts and follow the Golden Rule. This countercultural way of grace marks the Christian community out from others. Jesus makes the point by showing how the default position of the world is self-interest. We love because we are loved. We do good to those who return the favour. We lend where repayment is guaranteed. But go to a different gear, operate on a different level and you will show the world you belong to God's family.

COCU15C Readings

The main focus this week is loving your enemy. Joseph was able to forgive his brothers, despite all they had done to him so many years before. It links in with Jesus' teaching in the Gospel. The Psalm is a salutary reminder that evil is temporary and death is the great leveller. We need to get our attitude right if we are not going to be embittered or cynical. When we reaffirm our trust in God we can dare to engage in the adventure of faith both by living right and loving our enemies.

(Starters for Sunday' Commentaries by Rev Colin Sinclair, Minister of Palmerston Place Church, Edinburgh)

Psalm 37:1-11, 39-40

Do not fret because of the wicked; do not be envious of wrongdoers, for they will soon fade like the grass, and wither like the green herb. Trust in the LORD, and do good; so you will live in the land, and enjoy security. Take delight in the LORD, and God will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD; trust in God, and God will act. God will make your vindication shine like the light, and the justice of your cause like the noonday. Be still before the LORD, and wait patiently for God; do not fret over those who prosper in their way, over those who carry out evil devices. Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath. Do not fret - it leads only to evil. For the wicked shall be cut off, but those who wait for the LORD shall inherit the land. Yet a little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look diligently for their place, they will not be there. But the meek shall inherit the land, and delight themselves in abundant prosperity. The salvation of the righteous is from the LORD; God is their refuge in the time of trouble. The LORD helps them and rescues them; God rescues them from the wicked, and saves them, because they take refuge in God.

"It's not fair"! Life is hard and sometimes it seems that other people, indeed the wrong people, get off lightly while those, seeking to do right before God and others, come off second best. The Psalmist adds another perspective - time. In the end they, like everyone else, die and what then? If they do not know God, serve God and love God and others, then their past achievements will count for nothing. The way of faith is to do what is right and leave the outcome to God. In many ways this mirrors Joseph's story. Put God centre stage, find your peace in God's presence and you will find balm for your soul. Continue to make correct choices – be patient not angry; don't work yourself into a lather or you will overreact. Take the long view of life. Evil gets found out. Wickedness will be judged and found wanting. It will be the meek who

will inherit the earth. The Psalmist concludes by reaffirming that salvation and strength comes from the Lord.

Genesis 45:3-11, 15

Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?" His brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence. 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. And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. 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. God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. 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. 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. 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. 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.' And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.

This dramatic scenes takes place years after Joseph's brothers first put him down a pit then sold him to passing Midianite traders. All that time they lived the lie before their father that Joseph was dead, torn to pieces by a wild animal. So nothing could have prepared them for what happened. They had struggled to make sense of the Governor's actions and attitude towards them. They had been accused of being spies and saw this unfair attack as punishment for how they had treated Joseph. Then they found silver among the grain and couldn't comprehend where it had come from. Their second visit to Egypt was just as bizarre. They were honoured without explanation by a meal from the governor and told that their God had put the silver in their sacks. On their return again there was silver among the grain but more significantly a silver cup was added to Benjamin's sack. When he is arrested the brothers stand by him in a way they never stood by Joseph all these years before. They show a concern for their father and brother that was new since Joseph had last been with them. Judah offers to take his brother's

place and suffer instead of him. It was this new attitude that finally breaches Joseph's defences and he breaks into weeping. Their surprise at his tears was nothing compared to their reaction to his first three words, probably spoken, to their surprise, in Hebrew, "I am Joseph!" Terror gripped them as their past wickedness was finally fully revealed. What followed shows the triumph of grace over judgment. Words of forgiveness and reconciliation come from Joseph's lips. He calls them closer and adds to his opening words the word "brother". "I am your brother, Joseph." He re-establishes the bond their betrayal had broken. Joseph's story shows his profound understanding of God's providence and how God used their wickedness for good. Twice he says, "You sold me"; 3 times he says, "God sent me ahead of you". Joseph took their actions seriously, but ascribes ultimate responsibility for the outcome to God. As governor, he would ensure many - who otherwise would have died - would survive the famine. He had been sent "to save lives". Instead of rejecting or punishing his brothers he extended a hand to them and told to bring his father down to Egypt to see out the famine years. Greeting Benjamin first, he embraced all his family and tears fell freely. Such is the wonder of forgiveness, of mercy and of grace. Healing and restoration had come after all these years.

1 Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-50

Someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, "The first man, Adam, became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven. What I am saying, brothers and sisters, is this: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.