

20 February 2022—The 7th Sunday after The Epiphany: Luke 6:27-38

Jesus takes us on a journey today. He begins with the way ‘the world’ loves. Jesus admits love is universal, in a limited way: even sinners love those who love them, giving in expectation of return. You surely noticed Jesus does not condemn limited love. All love, even stunted love, originates in God. Rather Jesus contrasts stunted love with God’s way: love your enemies, do good, give expecting no return. We assume this is humanly impossible. We are correct; mere human love cannot approach the perfection of God’s. Yet there is danger here. We conceive ideal love, and since we can never be *that* we must simply hope God remembers what unlikely candidates we are for love in the first place. Ironically, we can at once accept the ideal of love revealed in the Scriptures and at the same time excuse ourselves from the ideal because we are ‘only human.’ We think, ‘godly love is all right for monks and nuns, clergy and other oddballs, but I live in the real world and do the pitiful best I can.’ And there is the trap, settling for only the best *we* can do.

Jesus says: *...for God is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful...* (35c, 36). God loves you with unimaginable passion. God delights in you. You were created in love, to be loved, to share love. Our perfection in love begins, and grows, through our yearning to receive and enjoy God’s love. Sin is recognized in failing to do right and willingness to do wrong, but sin is born and grows in forgetting God loves you. Holiness is not your ability to do right and avoid wrong. You are made holy as you come to believe, know, experience, and live the fact of God’s love, that you are God’s joy.

The founder of the L’Arche Communities for the severely handicapped, Jean Vanier, wrote: “In every human being there is...a thirst for communion with another, a cry to be loved and understood...but to have this communion with another involves demands: to come out of one’s shell of protection, to become vulnerable in order to love and understand others, to call them forth as special and unique, to share and to give space and nourishment to them. That is where the pain and fear lie, even...the incapacity to love. Jesus calls his followers to love...as he loves them, not just to love others as one loves oneself; ...to love others with the very love of God; to see them with the eyes of the Lord. And we can only see and love them like that if we ourselves have experienced Jesus loving us with a liberating love. It is only then that we can open ourselves and become vulnerable and grow to greater openness to others” (**Community & Growth**, page 30).

Here are three suggestions on living God’s love. First simply, and continuously remember God loves you. Make it a willful, conscious fact: say, “I am the delight of God’s heart.” Even if you doubt it, are skeptical, think it childish or weird. “I am the delight of God’s heart.” Write it on your heart, let it echo in your consciousness, let this flow through you like a river.

Secondly, remember that your failures are pathways to holiness. Our unwillingness to be loved despite our failings is what separates from God, others, and ultimately our true selves. Our failures teach us humility since we are confronted with our weakness; accept your weakness and seek God’s mercy. This is the foundation for love and mercy with others. If God knows my sins and loves me, if I am to love as Christ loves me, then others’ weaknesses and wrongs are occasions for me to share God’s love and mercy with them. Our desire for forgiveness and reconciliation, even if such attempts are rebuffed, testify that God’s love working in us is stronger than human weakness and wrong.

Third, receiving God’s love freely is only with God’s help. We have all had wounding experiences of not being loved. You will only be free to love and be loved, as you are healed from such wounds. We can wallow in believing ourselves unloved, unloving, and unlovable but it is a self-indulgent waste of time. Offer your wounds to God who desires our healing because God loves us; we can begin to know both wholeness and holiness. We must simply want to be loved and learn from Jesus how to be loved and how to love.

...love your enemies, do good and lend expecting nothing in return....and you will be children of the Most High...

Blessing and honor, thanksgiving and praise, more than we can offer, more than we can conceive, be yours, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, by all angels, all mortals, all creatures, now and for ever. Amen.