

Worship Resources - *Which Cup Do You Prefer?*

7th Sunday after Epiphany, Year C,

20th February, 2021

Genesis 45:3-11, 15 NRSV / Luke 6: 27-38 NIV

Prelude

[*Prelude in C Major by JS Bach*](#)

Annie Center

Call to Worship

The enemy: love them The oppressor: walk the mile with them The Master:
turn the other cheek to them

This doormat faith seems too much to bear in a world where those who bully
always seem to win

The enemy: imbalance them with love The oppressor: shame the law that
Oppresses The Master: turn the cheek as an equal

This rebellious faith seems too much to bear in a world where those who bully
are loved back to justice by the bullied But this is heaven's revolution and we are
called into it come let us worship love's rebel, Jesus

Invocation

Holy Jesus, You call us into a life that others have told us is easy, but it is not.
You challenge us to forgive, to love our enemies, to bless those who curse us.
We want the easy way, but You have given us the hard path. Grant us the patience
and endurance to journey with You, to allow ourselves at times to stumble, to live
into the hard way so that we might fully experience Your love, grace and peace in this
world, by becoming a people full of love and grace and forgiving others.
In Your name we pray. Amen.

Opening Music

[*Come, Let Us All Unite to Sing*](#) **12** (Lyric Video)

text by Howard Kingsbury, music by Edmund S. Lorenz,
performed and posted to YouTube by University Mennonite Church,
State College, PA

First Testament Reading: **Genesis 45:3-11, 15 NRSV**

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.

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.’

Hymn [*For the Healing of the Nations*](#) **367** (Lyric Video)

(sung to the tune of God of grace and God of glory, #366

(text by Fred Kaan, music by John Hughes, performed and posted to YouTube by Kristen Young, used and reported under CCLI Streaming License 20261246

A Time of Prayer

Joys and Concerns

Pastoral Prayer

Heavenly Father, we call upon you in Jesus’ name. We come with empty hands. We have not been able to love our enemies. As a rule we have never even seen them. We have avoided them. When we saw them, we felt only fear and anger, not love.

So we come to you, not as the children of your love, but as the enemy of our enemies, beseeching you for ourselves and all the others;

Bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you.
Forgive us for what we have failed to do for our enemies.

You lead us out of the constriction of fear and out of the prison of hate, into the wide space of freedom. Let us see your sun, which rises upon the evil and the good, and rejoice in its warmth, together with our enemies.

Lord, help me to relax. Take from me the tension that makes peace impossible. Take from me the fears that do not allow me to venture into the love and compassion I'm called.

Take from me the worries that blind my sight. Take from me the distress that hides your joy.

Help me to know that I am with you, that I am in your care, that I am in your love, that you and I are one. **Amen.**

Gospel Reading: Luke 6: 27-38 NIV

“But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,

bleed 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.”

Message - *Which Cup Do You Prefer?*

Pastor Glenn

When we think of cups, glasses, vessels that contain things we value, we tend to fall into two camps: either glass half empty or glass half full. And we may waver between the two depending on our perspective at the time. Sometimes we feel blessed, other times maybe not so much. Sometimes we feel valued, other times maybe not so much. I'm sure we've all heard at some point some version of the phrase "do unto others as you would have done to you?", what's often referred to as "the golden rule." It's certainly found in various forms throughout the Judeo-Christian scriptures. When asked what the greatest commandment is, Jesus even highlights a version of this, "to love your neighbor as yourself." So we often think that the "golden rule" is something that is unique to our own faith tradition, yet this concept of treating others with fairness and equity was a well-established ethical principle in the Greco-Roman world. You treated others the way you'd expect to be treated. It made good sense. It was a way of ordering social interactions that, in theory, would ensure a certain order and politeness to human encounters and dealings.

In fact, this principle of reciprocity was so refined that customs were developed to reinforce this concept in polite society, which fall into three categories: gift, exchange, and retribution. If you were someone of significant means, you would freely give of your resources to those at the other end of the economic scale, understanding that they lack the ability to return your gift in-kind, being satisfied instead with their gratitude and sense of obligation to you. With someone who was your equal, whether in personal sphere or the business realm, it was expected that there would be the regular exchange of gifts, where the expectation is that the gifts exchanged would be of similar value in order that all parties feel gratified without being shamed by an inequity in the gift exchange. However, not all people played nice. Sometimes someone would in some way cause you harm, whether physical, financial, or worst of all, dishonor you in some way.

The solution, both in the Gentile, and Jewish world of Jesus' time would be to enact your vengeance in a like way. In other words, you would enact the same level of harm to the aggressor as you suffered as the initial victim, an "eye for an eye." So the proverbial "golden rule" is not as exclusive as we may have thought, However, in our gospel lesson today, Jesus takes this notion of fair treatment to a whole new level. The former way of thinking was very self-focused. You treated someone else how "you" would want to be treated. It was based on how your behavior benefitted you, with the focus on yourself. Jesus is taking that very human perspective and turning it around to a more heaven-based outlook. Instead of how should I treat people so I am treated reciprocally, it becomes how should I treat people so that they benefit the most from my behavior, without reciprocation, without thought of what I might receive as a reward.

Luke's Jesus is introducing us to grace in his "Sermon on the Plain.". It's important when reading this passage to understand the unique point of view we have in Luke versus the

similar story in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew. The writers of Matthew and Luke both include this story in their gospels, which does not occur in Mark's gospel. Without delving too deep into biblical scholarship, it is worth noting that both Matthew and Luke obviously have at their base the text found in Mark, which has been shown to be the first Gospel produced and distributed. However, they also have additional stories that seem to be pulled from another source document which scholars refer to as the "Q" source. While that original document has been lost to history, we find pieces of it in the additional elements found in Matthew and Luke that are not present in Mark. The Beatitudes and this Sermon are examples of those elements. But each of these later Gospels also puts its own perspective on those stories. In Matthew, this story is related more to the notion of seeking sanctification, to being "perfect as your father in Heaven is perfect." For Luke's audience, the emphasis is more on grace and mercy, "He is kind to the ungrateful and wicked... Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."

For the followers of Luke's gospel, they would understand this from the "gift" perspective of the "golden rule," giving to another out of one's own abundance. Except in this case, it's an abundance of grace and mercy, not any worldly wealth and abundance. Jesus is telling the disciples that they have the wealth of heaven at their disposal, but that wealth isn't what we're used to thinking of as valuable in this world: grace, mercy, kindness, selflessness. It's still a pretty bitter pill to swallow when one still has to endure the potential consequences of showing the mercy and kindness of God in this world. Verses 27 and 28 are the clinchers. "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you." Then we're told to turn the other cheek. Pretty tough advice, then and now.

How do you show kindness to those who truly are your enemies, people who express their hatred towards you? To those who abuse and curse you? People have struggled with the words of this sermon since the day it was given. It goes against everything we think of as common sense, of what is right and fair. Yet there really isn't much room for interpretation. Jesus means what he says. But it's also important not to take this as meaning we are to be doormats to the world either. Loving your enemy is active, not passive work.

In Jesus' day it meant publicly calling attention to injustice and calling attention to the aggressor. To force someone to strike your other cheek with the the back of their hand was to force them to behave dishonorably, as was giving them your shirt when they sued you for your cloak. It showed them love by illustrating the wrong they were perpetrating. I think that's a meaning that has been lost somewhat over time.

Jesus' audience would grasp the connection to public shame and dishonor in turning the other cheek and stripping down when sued for one's cloak. Groups like the Brethren have interpreted that to being passively nonviolent, which I'm not sure captures the same meaning. Jesus is clear that violence is not the answer, but it's important in our responses to injustice today that we make the aggressor aware in the same way.

We all meet this scripture from our own perspective and experience, and we need to find

that same meaning in our own lives. For example, someone who is in an abusive relationship will not demonstrate the same meaning to their aggressor by taking the abuse in silence. How can someone in that circumstance demonstrate God's mercy and kindness to their abuser without losing their own self-worth and value. How can the abuser be made aware of the sin of their behavior? How does the bullied teen stand up to the bully without resulting in retribution and revenge? In all cases, how can we model God's grace and mercy, be the witness to the world we are called to.

We still live in a world whose justice is still largely based in the eye for an eye model? Can we support criminal laws that lack compassion and grace? Can we support governments and policies that rely on war to resolve disputes through retribution? Can we support politicians who encourage violence and retribution?

Corrie Ten Boom in the book, *Reflections of God's Glory*, wrote, "In Africa a man came to a meeting with bandaged hands. I asked him how he had been injured. He said, "My neighbor's straw roof was on fire; I helped him to put it out and that's how my hands were burned. "Later I heard the whole story. The neighbor hated him and had set his roof on fire while his wife and children were asleep in the hut. They were in great danger. Fortunately, he was able to put out the fire in his house on time. But sparks flew over to the roof of the man who had set the house on fire and his house started to burn. There was no hate in the heart of this Christian; there was love for his enemy and he did everything he could to put out the fire in his neighbor's house. That is how his own hands were burned."

That is the kind of love and mercy we are to show, the grace we are to model. How can we love those who bear us ill will? It's important to remember as well that this lesson is not just for our enemy's benefit. It's for ours as well. When we harbor resentment, anger, and hatred towards another, those internal feelings do nothing to the other person, they only drag us down. By turning it around and praying for their well-being, we move from the negative to the positive. We get a glimpse into what divine grace really is. We really discover what it means to have a cup that is overflowing and can't be contained. A cup of love and kindness, one overflowing with grace and compassion. One that is plenty big enough. Amen.

Reflection on the Word

A Call to Serve

When we give of ourselves, we are witnesses to the transforming love of God in Christ. I invite you to give as generously as you have received.

As we listen to the following interlude played by Annie, let's reflect on how we share grace and compassion with others, particularly those who we are categorically opposed to.

A Time for Reflection [*Londonderry Air*](#)

traditional Irish melody

Annie Center

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

Accept these gifts, we humbly pray, O God. Let them give you honor and glory as we serve the needs of your people. And let the called and redeemed of God say, Amen

Hymn

[*Make Me A Channel Of Your Peace*](#)

(Lyric Video)

(written by Sebastian Temple, arr. by Martin Neary, performed by Ruth and Joy Everingham, posted to YouTube by Everingham Music, used with permission)

Benediction

Send us into the world, O Holy One,
Ready to witness to your generosity and forgiveness
Ready to be recognized as those who follow your Way
Ready to shape a world of justice, peace and joy.

Postlude

[*Praise The Lord by WA Mozart*](#)

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