

Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. The Golden Rule. Pounded into our heads and it stands as the ideal of society, world-round.

But this is the ideal in a society when all abide by it; once people step out of line, hurting others, stealing, creating conflict, judging and condemning without grace, we begin to demand a halt on the injustice; we want the state of equilibrium brought back, to where everyone does what everyone else would want

This paradigm is really selfish, though. It looks out for the individual, who is willing to make some sacrifices for the sake of general peace; even though I don't like my neighbour, I'll keep my knives to myself because I would rather have some anger seething inside than fight for my life against all those who seethe against me. But if I could get away with it; if there were no consequences for my actions, not even any guilt from within or without. If I could actually have the world my way and everyone treat me exactly how I'd want, well, I wouldn't end up reciprocating such actions, and let's say it wouldn't be pretty, because in reality I want people to treat me wonderfully despite how I treat them.

So what if I treated people the way I wanted to be treated—the way I genuinely want to be treated, not a sugar-coated, keep me accountable and help me to grow kind of way. If I treated people in a way that gave them exactly what they wanted and didn't demand justice, I'd feel a lot like a doormat, walked on, soggy and dirty, frayed at the edges, more than likely dead.

This is how Jesus tells us to behave, today. His commands are not necessarily to us as parents, satisfying every whim of our children, nor as teachers and employers, giving to those under us everything they can think of. This is how we are to act specifically as Christians, as those living among non-believers, and believers who struggle with sin (which happens to be all of us). This is to us as Christians, living at apparent odds with their opinions and desires and actions.

Our enemies in this world are to be those whom we pour out an abundance of grace—prayers, blessings, and our flesh and possessions alike. We aren't to keep track of who has taken what from us,

how many times we've forgiven them, when the last time they were even nice to us despite us being loving and a blessing unto them.

Afterall, what benefit, what grace, what gift is it to you if you demonstrate the ability to be civil and "gracious" to those who will be able to scratch your back in due time? That is the least that should be expected from any of us—it's certainly the least that we expect from everyone else.

The fact is, what Jesus calls us to do, to love your enemies, is unnatural for the sin-stained will to do. For those who look out for their own flesh and blood, they will do unto others what they fully anticipate others to do unto them. To love your enemies is to walk in the opposite direction, to be vulnerable, susceptible to their poor will, their bad intentions. If they truly are your enemy they will very likely take advantage of your naïve good will.

And that which is unnatural in loving your neighbours is just as strange as lending to those with bad credit history and ill will towards you; it's bizarre to give away your shirt and undershirt to those who have no intention of returning it to you in one piece; it's unnatural being slapped on the face and saying "is your anger dealt with? Or would it help to bruise this cheek too?" Doing good to those in your camp makes good sense because they will care for you when you are sick and old someday; going into the camp of the enemy to do good to them puts you in danger, it steals your time and resources, it is not an investment that is likely to pay.

This is what Christ calls us to. Hearing His teaching is a high order; it calls for a counter-intuitive move that is going to be impossible for us. But that which He calls us to live out also acts like an overture for His life; if you hear His words today you will be able to see them in action throughout His days.

It is Christ who loved, did good unto, blessed, and prayed for those around Him. He turned His cheek when mankind, us included, struck Him with our anger, and He lent us His cloak, that of His righteousness and allowed Himself to be stripped naked on our behalf. He lent to us, giving us more than we could ever return to Him but He didn't once expect a return. He was merciful to us, bringing us

heaven and all its gifts without any merit on our part. He did not judge us nor did He condemn us—He stole that away from us, that He would forgive us and give to us blessings beyond all measure or imagination. The cross is the climax of today's teaching when Christ demonstrates His unwillingness to focus on Himself, insisting that He would care for those who hate Him, praying that they would be forgiven even for taking His life.

What Christ describes in today's sermon is Himself, blessed amidst worldly woes, and living out such a life that others would receive the mercy—the gifts and graces—of God, all without cost, without even the expectation that they listen to Him. He just gave.

And that doesn't change today. He gives and gives and gives, without expecting *anything* in return. Rain from the sky, food from the ground, friends from work and our neighbourhood, and companionship in marriage. All of these are blessings that He bestows on every person He created and has cherished throughout their days.

And regarding His lifegiving grace, there are no mores strings attached than with simple bread. Absolutely anyone is free to walk in here today and hear the good news of the Gospel. Then they are free to laugh out loud, ridiculing the message heard here just as they are free to rejoice in it and cling to it; their response, their payment in kind, does not change the message that always awaits them. While Christ yearns that all would hear and believe that He died once and all for them too, the cost to Him is not too great if He is rejected and His Church, His body is persecuted; He doesn't revoke His grace.

But how on earth are we to maintain such a giving attitude, to those who would despise us because we bear Christ's name and proclaim His message into the world? We don't have the natural inclinations to such love that Christ seemed to have. In fact our natural impulse is to defend Christ and His Word and to strike those who would tarnish His name and message, who would deny or convolute His very good message.

This way of doing that Christ impels us to this week is the natural outgrowth and consequence of our way of being which we heard last week. If we live in Christ, who was blessed in and for eternity despite temporal woes, who endured poverty and hunger, sorrow and hatred in this life knowing that His peace, joy, and reward existed even now in the heavens above; if we live in Christ, we will become merciful by His mercy.

So to trust that Christ is enough for us, that His forgiveness covers all our sins, to know that His blessings will heal our woes, that His joy would one day do away with our tears, that His rewards will eventually satisfy our deepest needs; if we are blessed in this world amidst despair because we have Christ, it means that we will not demand justice for us so that we do not move backwards in this world because our focus and satisfaction will not be found in this world, in its food and relationships, in its joys and possessions; our focus and hope is found in Christ.

So we can lend to those who will not pay us back because we haven't lost anything if we never see a dime of it again—we haven't lost anything of real consequence, at least. And if we love those that refuse to love us, we know a source of love that will replenish our heart and soul despite the fact that we are throwing our care away like money into a money pit. We'll never see a return on our investment; they'll never treat us in turn with concern; but we are none the poorer for it!

Perhaps praying for our enemies is the easiest way of living out today's lesson because at most it feels like we are losing a few minutes of our time; if they don't pray for us, we can pray for ourselves. But in that moment, we actually give up something more—this is why it can feel hard to pray for your enemies. We give up the clear-cut definition of them as our enemies, ourselves as helpless victim; we pray beside them as if we were united with them, as if we care for them. But so often it feels good to be their enemy because they're wrong and they ought to change and be right like us. But Christ didn't refuse to pray until after His enemies had converted and joined His team. He prayed that this would be

the case, that they would be forgiven, but that was long before many, if any, joined the side of the redeemed; and we ought to do the same.

This is what He calls us to; to be merciful in all our living just as He was, and is, and will always be merciful unto us and His whole creation.

Later in the sermon on the plain, He talks about the fruit we bear; the seed of mercy has been planted, and here He demands that merciful fruit arise from our shoots and limbs. If we are in Christ and are awaiting the blessings of heaven despite the woes of today, this is what will happen as we do not defend ourselves but instead just give. If we are Christians, this is what life will be—it's the sanctified life.

But His mercy for you is not dependent on such fruit. He is merciful, truly merciful. He is not transactional; He's a terrible record keeper. So He calls you to become merciful just as His Father is merciful, just as He, the image of the Father is merciful, just as those who bear His name and image, Christians, the redeemed, are merciful.

But His mercy is not dependent on, waiting on, looking out for your mercy. It is here for you today. And as He works in your life, you will become merciful—it's not a question of your efforts but of His change in you. The most that you can do is repent of your unmerciful attitude and actions and turn to Christ, who in His free mercy makes you like He is, giving, not focussed on transactions nor record keeping, just giving—of your forgiveness, time, even your money. Because to give it out freely does not mean you're out anything—you already have Christ, freely given, freely received.

This is what this text is all about. My challenge to you this week, that you may rejoice in how much mercy has been rained down upon you is this.

Take this text. Read it in the morning; hear what Christ does, how much He loves you, and pray that you would be united in Christ who has done all this for you, that you may do it for others. Read this text in the evening and repent, repent for those places where you did not live up to this text, repent and

rejoice because Christ's mercy for you was not dependent on you wanting to live by these commands, let alone actually fulfilling them.

That you even thought about following them this day is due to His mercy, that you heeded any of them, again, is by His mercy alone. So rejoice that His mercy is new every evening—it will forgive you and carry you until the next day to seek to share His love again, unless you end up perishing that evening and even then you will die in His grace, knowing that He has forgiven you and will welcome you into His courts with open arms, pouring out to you mercy upon mercy, grace upon grace.

Knowing all His costly and yet free grace is for you, pray that you would do unto others what has already been done for you.

Amen