

2025 02 23 – Love Your Enemies

Scripture: Luke 6:27-38 (*The Inclusive Bible*)

How many of you watched the final game of the 4 Nations hockey tournament?

It was amazing wasn't it? McDavid's overtime goal was spectacular. But we all know it could have gone either way—both Canada and the United States were playing at an incredible level. That's why the adrenaline was pumping so high across this country late on Thursday evening. The hockey rivalry between our two countries is legendary and, of course, recent political actions by the Oval Office raised the competition to a new level. It was as if our Canadian hockey team was playing not just to prove that hockey is truly our game, but also to demonstrate our country's strength and even our sovereignty.

All that being said, I think the most important moment for me was what happened after the game ended. The American team stayed on the ice while the Canadians congratulated themselves, and then the two teams exchanged handshakes, conversation and obvious respect for their opponents. As we all know many members of the Canadian team play on U.S. NHL teams and many of the U.S. players suit up for Canadian teams. In that moment the fights, the hits, the rivalry were set aside as they recognized each other's humanity. That exchange of handshakes was a wonderful metaphor for the interconnectedness of our two countries and our world. Our connections, our relationships, how we treat each other, define us as people, as communities, and as countries.

Today's scripture from the Gospel of Luke is all about relationships. Jesus is preaching his Sermon on the Plain. He has just completed the beatitudes—the blessings and woes—that we explored last week. And now Jesus says, to his disciples and the crowd that has gathered,

To you who hear me, I say: love your enemies.

Do good to those who hate you,
bless those who curse you, and
pray for those who mistreat you.

Jesus is asking us to love our enemies. So first let's be clear about this word "love." In English, we have just one word to describe many different levels of this emotion. But, in Greek, the original language of most of the New Testament, there are several different words for love. For example, they have eros for sexual passion, philia for deep friendship, and storge for love of family. In this instance, the writer of the Gospel of Luke is using the Greek word agape which means love for everyone. Martin Luther King Jr. described agape in this way. He said:

Agape is understanding, redemptive goodwill for all [people].

Agape is an overflowing love, a spontaneous love,
which seeks nothing in return.

And theologians would say that it is the love of God
operating in the human heart.

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Dr. King is describing the kind of love that Jesus was talking about. It is the kind of love that we are to feel for all people, for all of God's creation. It is the kind of love that we feel when we are deeply connected to the Ground of our Being, to the Essence of Love. We are being asked to look beyond the actions of our neighbours, both near and far, and to recognize them as our siblings, as blessed children of God.

In today's reading, you heard the words, "Do to others what you would have them do to you." This is often called the Golden Rule. And it's a pretty good standard to follow. These words, in one form or another, are actually found in the teachings of all the major religions of the world. It's a rule that speaks of fairness and justice. It's a rule that speaks of kindness and compassion.

But Jesus is pushing this idea one step further. He is saying it's not enough to love those who love you or are good to you. It's not enough to lend to those who will pay you back. It's not enough to forgive those who have already pardoned you. Jesus is saying that we are to love without expecting any kind of repayment. Agape love doesn't require a return on our investment. Agape love keeps no accounts. Agape love goes beyond "fairness."

Jesus even says, "When they slap you on the cheek, turn and give them the other; when they take your coat, let them have your shirt as well." Yes, we are supposed to be merciful and generous; but let's be clear, Jesus is not suggesting that we condone abuse or bullying of any kind. Whether it occurs on the playground, in a marriage, in a workplace or even in the political arena. Love is

not submission or even obedience. Agape love acts to end abuse. Not only for the sake of the abused but also for the sake of the abuser, who harms themselves as well as their victim with their actions. Again, here is how Martin Luther King Jr. describes this kind of love. He says:

When you rise to love on this level you love all [people], not because you like them, not because their ways appeal to you, not because they are worthful to you, but you love all [people] because God loves them. And you rise to the noble heights of loving the person who does the evil deed while hating the deed that the person does. And I think this is what Jesus means when he says, "Love your enemies."

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Martin Luther King Jr. was someone who preached and who lived agape love. He was someone who faced discrimination and racism every day just because of his skin colour and who fought for justice while also striving to love his enemies.

There is a lot of animosity building in our world today. There are a lot of hateful words being thrown around. I believe that we are being called to look beyond the words and the actions and to recognize the deep connection that we have with our neighbours on this continent and around the world. I believe we are being called to name the bullies and the abusers and to recognize that their words and actions are not a reflection of the diversity and the goodness of God's creation.

The Holy Mystery is the Essence of Love, a love that is unconditional and everlasting, a love that is merciful and compassionate, a love that we call grace. We are all recipients of that love. We all hold the divine spark within our hearts. We have the ability to let that love operate from within us. We have the ability to shake the hands of those who would defeat us. We have the ability to respect and to have goodwill for those who curse us. We have the ability to recognize the humanity of those who hate us. We have the ability to forgive those who have hurt us.

That is what Jesus is calling us to do. We are being called to be beacons of truth and grace in the midst of deception and hate. We are being called to actions of love and mercy in the midst of anger and revenge. We are being called to look beyond an economy of give and take to consider what is best for the common good. We are being called to love our enemies.

May it be so. Amen.