

ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



23 FEBRUARY 2025

EPIPHANY 7



LUKE 6: 27 & 36: LOVE YOUR ENEMIES - BE MERCIFUL
JUST AS YOUR FATHER IS MERCIFUL

WORSHIP AT HOME

This time is an opportunity to be still, seeking to be aware of the presence of God within.

Set aside a time for this practice; prepare yourself, as you might for a usual Sunday morning and remember that there are others from the congregation gathering at the same time as you. There are also many from the church around the globe who are gathering to seek the presence of God as we are. We join with them all.

Go to your prepared place OR prepare a space in the house; a comfortable chair, a lit candle, turn off distracting noises and close the door if that will help you to be still. This is something that does not need to be hurried.

GREETING:

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit,
be with you all.

And also with you.

CALL TO WORSHIP:

Be still before God and wait patiently
for our hearts are offered safe space to wonder.
Be still before God, our harbour secure
as God's love calls us to worship.

HYMN: TIS 111: Praise to the Lord

PRAYERS OF ADORATION, CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

ADORATION

Let us pray
Your light springs up for the righteous
and all the people have seen your glory.
Blessed are you, Sovereign God, ruler of the nations,
to you be praise and glory for ever.
From the rising of the sun to its setting
your name is proclaimed in all the world.
As the Sun of Righteousness dawns in our hearts
anoint our lips with the seal of your Spirit
that we may witness to your gospel
and sing your praise in all the earth.
Blessed be God, Source, Word, and Spirit.
Blessed be God for ever.

CONFESSION/REPENTANCE

Reconciling God,
hear us as we recall the fraught words and resentments
that we harbour in our minds.
Forgive us for the harshness of our responses
and the unkindness of our inaction.
Forgive us for hurts inflicted
and thoughts unkind
Forgive us for being intentional and unintentional

agents of division, fear and discrimination.
Draw us close to the fire of your Holy Spirit,
where light transforms the hidden darkness of our lives,
and sparks our activities for life and peace
with renewed energy serving Christ.
Amen

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

In the wisdom of God,
the world did not know God through wisdom;
for God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom,
and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.
Hear then Christ's word of grace to us:
'Your sins are forgiven'.
Thanks be to God.

SERVICE OF THE WORD - Read by Heather Baxter

Your Word, O Lord, is a lamp to our feet;

A light to our path

GENESIS 45:3-11, 15

³Joseph 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.

⁴Then 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. ⁵And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. ⁶For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither ploughing nor harvest. ⁷God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. ⁸So 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. ⁹Hurry 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. ¹⁰You 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. ¹¹I 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." ¹⁵And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.

The word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

LUKE 6:27-38

²⁷But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. ³⁰Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. ³¹Do to others as you would have them do to you.

³²'If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴If 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. ³⁵But 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. ³⁶Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

³⁷'Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; ³⁸give, 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 Gospel of the Lord
Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ

HYMN: TIS 670: Jesus, put this song...

SERMON: Love Your Enemies! You are kidding!

Let's start with some thinking about an enemy you have or know of.

Oh yes, of course, like me you have no enemies! So, let's define enemy a bit.

The thesaurus has other words for enemy: opponent / adversary / foe / rival / competitor / antagonist / nemesis.

And the Collins Dictionary lists 4 meanings for the word

1. A person hostile to or opposed to a policy, cause, person, or group, especially one who actively tries to do damage; opponent.
2. An armed adversary; opposing military force
3. A hostile nation or people
4. Something that harms or opposes; adversary

Jesus commands his disciples to 'love your enemies.'

Now, we are not going to disobey Jesus' command, yes command, to love our enemies, are we?

But that means, Jesus throws us a very very difficult challenge in today's reading from Luke's gospel

³²If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴If 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. ³⁵But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return.

Whoa! I think this is one of those texts we put in the 'too hard' basket – 'to be considered at a later date!' A much later date!

The first step in this undertaking is to ask: WHO ARE OUR ENEMIES?

Who are the people we can't stand? Who are the people who have hurt us? Who are those who have inflicted unwarranted harm on us and those around us? Who are those who take, and take and take and never give in return, who steal and harm, and hurt and deny justice to others and bully and lie and create division and fear and devastate family life in violent ways, or you rail against any who are 'different.!' It's a long list to which I am sure we could all add!

How do we do as you command Lord!?! How do we deal with these enemies, in our lives Oh Jesus, this is really HARD! Surely Jesus, you don't expect us to love all these!?

³²If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them³⁵But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return.'

BUT, as we all collapse in our pews thinking that is just TOO HARD let me share with you a bit of grammar, which I think might ease that pressure! Yes, believe it or not a bit of grammar!

That is, note how Jesus uses the word 'love' in this passage and elsewhere. Is he using 'love' as a NOUN or as a VERB?

He uses the word as a VERB – and as you all know from those boring English lessons on grammar: A Noun is a Something; whereas a Verb describes Doing something. A verb is a DOING word.

If we think of LOVE as a NOUN, an entity or a thing, which is ONE WAY of understanding the word, but if we just understand it that way, we hugely de-value LOVE! – I promise you!

Then love just becomes an idea, a commodity, a product and, oh boy, does the world ever like products, products which can be SOLD, so as to make A PROFIT! And love SELLS, oh my golly, it SELLS like hot cakes. That's why the commercial world loves LOVE so much. And not just the commercial world, either! This product 'LOVE' also sells well in more sinister worlds!

Love is best understood as a 'doing word,' a verb, we are born TO love – love is an action! And if we understand love as an action, then that means, we can engage in an act of love while we may not like or feel good about what we are doing, but still act in a way that reflects concern for the other.

Now, this makes loving our enemies much more realistic – more achievable! We can still DO things that make the situation better, as an act of love, while at the same time holding fraught feelings and difficult emotions.

Let me share a couple of illustrations

When I was a primary school kid of about 8 or 9 years of age, I threw one of those flat gliding stones at an older boy down the street who was an out and out bully. He terrified all us (smaller) kids in the neighbourhood. And we all 'hated' him. The rock hit him in the head and badly gashed his forehead. That I hit him was a complete fluke! But as he collapsed to the ground, with blood everywhere and him screaming out in pain, I thought I had killed him, and immediately ran home in a terrible state.

My parents' reaction was to scold me for throwing rocks. Then they went and visited the boy's parents. After that, my mum sat me down, assured me the boy was OK, and said something like, 'You may think that boy is a bully, but God still loves him, doesn't like him being a bully, but still loves him, and we, you, me and the other boys who have been bullied by him, have to find ways to show that love to him.' "How?" I replied. Mum said, 'apologising for any hurt, invite him to play after school and tell him nicely, that you don't want him to bully you anymore.' She then added that I was to come with her to his place and apologise to him and tell him I would never throw stones at him again.' I remember meeting with him and saying sorry but can't remember if he joined in our afterschool games, but I can recall that he never bullied us again.

In my preparation I came across the following piece entitled, 'True-life Story: Loving the unlovable.' Let me share it with you.

'But how do we [actually] do it [love the un-lovable]?

Recently, I heard a pastor give a sermon about John 13. It changed how I view treating the hard-to-like people around me.

Here's the big thing the pastor said that blew my mind:

'At the Last Supper, Jesus was in the same room with a bunch of people about to betray him, deny him and desert him. And he knew it. Talk about hard-to like people. But what does Jesus do? "He got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him" (John 13:4-5).'

Whoa! He's surrounded by guys who don't deserve his love or respect. And he washes their feet!

Right here, Jesus shows how to love the unlovable [love the enemy]. It's not to just tolerate them. Or just not make fun of them. Or to pretend you love them. Instead, we should SERVE THEM.

Here's why:

1. Serving gives us an easy way to see how we should love. It's not just some mushy, hard-to-grasp emotion, but an action.
2. Serving someone has a way of changing the way we see them. If you are continually looking out for a way to help someone, it's very hard to think they're worthless. It's very hard to stay mad at them.' <https://steemit.com/christianity/@icelarbes/true-life-story-loving-the-unlovable>

While it may be impossible to **feel** love for the enemy, it is not impossible to **act** in certain ways, even for those whom experience has shown to be the most entrenched of opponents. What Jesus means by the love of enemies becomes clear in the three verbal demands that follow and that explain the initial demand of Jesus to 'love your enemies, and they are: "Do good," "bless," "pray." (Repeat "Do good," "bless," "pray.")

BUT WHY?

Why should it be the case that disciples of Jesus must love their enemies? Significantly, no promise is made that this action will convert the enemy into a friend, will modify the enemy's behaviour, or even alter one's own feelings toward that enemy!

Why then do something which seems so useless, so un-productive, so unlikely to succeed?

The answer is so obvious, isn't it?

All of this [loving your enemies stuff] is demanded by virtue of GOD'S OWN GRACIOUSNESS AND MERCY. 'Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.'" Says Jesus.' (v36.)

So, Christians behave lovingly to their enemies not as a ploy to outmanoeuvre them, not even because they anticipate a reward (although the language of reward is [also] used by Jesus here), but finally because God is a God of mercy. God is kind even to the undeserving, and that kindness must be found also in the lives of God's children.

It is always, in all of our actions and relationships and connections; it is always and finally about GRACE and MERCY. God's grace and mercy to ALL God's children. Enemies included!

In this way alone can we truly love our enemies.

Let us pray

HYMN: TIS 683: God! When human bonds are broken

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE: Prepared by Warwick Barry

"As we prepare for our prayers for others, we light this candle to remember all those who are part of our church community but who are not at worship with us today."

Light the candle.

Lead in

"When we claim that certain people are evil, enemies or just plain difficult and beyond God's love and salvation simply for who they are, in terms of their religion, race, gender, sexual orientation, or political views, then we are not the church of resurrection. God calls us to die to this very

human, “mortal” way of living. But, when we proclaim that God’s love is available to all, that God welcomes and accepts all for who they are, we become a church of the resurrection.” (Rev John Van Der Lah)

Prayer

It was scandalous then, Jesus:
your inappropriate choice of associations,
your insistence on being with those
who were least likely to be friends of God.
It’s scandalous now, Jesus!
We like to think we’re more gracious than that,
but we still struggle
with who you choose to include.

Yet, you also include us who, if we’re honest,
are just as unlikely,
just as undeserving;
And as we walk with you and work with you
we discover others that journey beside us,
and who find us to be just as much the unlikely companions
that we find them to be;

So, we remember unlikely leaders,
who with few resources and little influence,
make significant contributions to the world;

We remember unlikely healers,
who through little more than their compassion,
bring wholeness to broken and wounded others;

We remember unlikely benefactors,
who, with no wealth to speak of,
give generously to those with even less;

We remember unlikely saints,
who, though tainted and stained, broken and imperfect,
bring sacredness and life to hopeless ones

And as we pray, we celebrate all the Zacchaeuses,
who, like us have been touched by your grace and forgiveness,
and have become your unlikely companions
in saving the world.

God of relationship,
we cannot ignore the brokenness
of our lives,
of our world,
of our Church.

We declare ourselves "fine"
with how things are
and yet long for the encouragement of Your presence
as we long to see the transformation
of a new creation taking place
in the communities of our world.

We pray for human relationships,

for spouses, partners,
parents and children,
working encounters and friendships.
We give thanks where sharing life with others is supportive,
and allows the other to thrive.
We remember those whose lives are fraught,
frantic,
and abusive.
Where those of any gender feel their worth questioned
by cruel words and threatening hands,
may they be led to the support
that keeps them safe.

We pray for the relationships of our world.
In testing times of war and conflict,
communities are tested
as those who have been displaced seek new homes
and places to shelter.
We give thanks for those many communities across the world
who have offered refuge to the outsider,
offering hospitality that allows stories to blend
and develop new ways to live in harmony with another.
We long for the discordant voices of our world to pause
and listen to the songs of others.
In what they hear,
may politicians and tyrants be offered wisdom
that seeks the best for all people and not power for themselves.

We pray for Christ's Church,
in all its vibrant colour,
and celebrate the many ways in which the story of Jesus is revealed.
Help us to value one another,
and to cherish our diversity.
In these days when churches unite and close,
may the Spirit's comfort be a balm to the pain of life,
and the Spirit's inventiveness inspire us
in sharing and shaping stories within our new communities.

God of relationship,
still our hearts,
as we patiently wait
for the Holy Spirit to lead us
in our sharing of Christ's story with all we encounter.
Amen

(Church of Scotland & Sacredise adapted)

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.**

For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.

HYMN: TIS 607: Make me a channel of your peace

DISMISSAL:

As we travel from here in the way of Christ,
we ask God to sow the seeds of love, hope, peace, mercy and justice in our everyday
words and actions, this day and always.
We ask God to invade our whole being with his love, enabling us to bless everyone, even
your enemies. Enabling us to refrain from judging others, but rather to be merciful and
generous to all.
To treat others as we would have them treat us.

BLESSING:

And may God be quick to act on your behalf;
May Christ Jesus raise you to new and everlasting life;
And may the Holy Spirit go before you
to prepare a place for you and provide for you.

WORD OF MISSION:

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord
In the name of Christ. Amen

SUNG BLESSING: Hymn TiS 779

POSTLUDE

You can find a copy of today's sermon along with other congregational
information on the church website.

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NEWS & NOTICES