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YEAR C

GENESIS 45:3-11, 15

1 CORINTHIANS 15:35-38, 42-50

LUKE 6:27-38

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These words from scripture are hardly words many of us live by. We read about Joseph and his brothers as Joseph finally has a chance to get even. If we read the rest of the story around this reading from Genesis 45 we get the idea that Joseph is not ready to forgive. He is not ready to let go of what happened before, but in the end, Joseph comes to the place where he understands that God's hand has been with him to preserve rather than destroy. God's hand of grace was on Joseph and now on his brothers and his father. According to human nature, Joseph has the right to get even for what his brothers did to him. The Torah even teaches, "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a life for a life." Joseph does not seek vengeance but grace and mercy. He does not do what he had the power to do. Joseph could have ordered his brothers to be executed but Joseph chose to forgive. Jesus teaches a similar message in the Sermon on the Plain. It is a message of love for enemies and doing good to those that seek to oppose us. Many of us live our lives under the doctrine of retribution. If you say bad things to me, I say bad things to you. If you hit me, I hit you. Jesus teaches something other than this. Jesus teaches that we love and forgive. He says that we do not seek to get even but we pray for those that have sought to harm us.

Luke 6:37 "Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven;

I know Jesus taught that if we do not judge we will not be judged but as I read these words from Genesis 45 and Luke 6 I am led to an attitude of judging others. I read Facebook and other social media and notice that there is lots of hatred among people. Many quote the Bible to support their claims but their attitudes are not loving as the Lord says we are to love. There are sprinkles of good news stories among the myriads of negative and hate filled stories most of

which are not true. Instead of seeking to love our neighbor and speak kindly of them we offer words of hatred and messages that say how worthless people are when they are not like us. Gossip is often the driving force on social media. One person seeks dirt on another person and soon many are spreading the dirt. When Jesus teaches against judging he is not saying that anything goes. Jesus does not say abuse is OK or that we should not deal with abusers and oppressors. Jesus is against showing signs of superiority. He is speaking against gossip. When I insist on judging you I have not been humble but have sought to be better than you. When I share gossip, I have sought to destroy you.

When Jesus says that we are to not judge he is asking us to take a look into the mirror. He says in other places that we look for a sliver in another person's eye ignoring the log that is in our own eye. Jesus might also be saying that we that are created in God's image are loved by God. Democrats, Republicans, Independents and the others are all created in God's image and God loves them all. If God loves them, we also need to love them. We may not want to hang out with them or even like what they say and do but we are not given permission to trash them. This is why I hesitate to speak negatively of another pastor or another ministry. I may engage them in conversation, but God did not give me permission to speak negatively about them. When I speak negatively about them I have also not humbled myself before God.

Luke 6:27-29 **“But 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**

Jesus gives a difficult teaching. Jesus taught about loving enemies and doing good to those who hate you. Along with these words, Jesus taught that we are to pray for that abuse us and to bless those who curse us. As Jesus taught this message the Jewish religious authorities were already seeking to trap him in his words. A couple of weeks ago he heard about the people in his home town

did more than slap his cheek. They tried to throw him off the cliff on the edge of Nazareth. They were not being loving, forgiving or compassionate. They had become enemies of Jesus and his message. They were quite possibly abusing him and cursing him because of his message. The scripture does not say Jesus condemned them or spoke harsh words against them. Jesus continued to love them with an unconditional love. He did not spend lots of time there, but he continued to pray for them.

When Jesus says to turn the other cheek, offer our coat and our shirt he is not saying we should welcome or accept abuse. Jesus does not promote us being doormats, but he is telling us to do more than is expected when it comes to Christian love and loving our neighbor. The slap Jesus refers to may have been a back of the hand slap which might have been an act of discipline for a slave or servant. Jesus may be saying that offering the other cheek means being hit with the front side of the hand or a fist. Turning the other cheek and giving a shirt along with the coat would also force the person slapping and taking to look at their victim in a different way. Offering the other cheek would have been a way to humble the person doing the slapping. It would no longer have been discipline but aggression. The aggression would have been not acceptable even though the first slap may have been.

Luke 6:35, 36 But 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.

When Jesus gave this teaching, he knew it would not be easy for anyone to respond to the call of discipleship. A few weeks ago, we read about Jesus calling disciples to follow him. The simple call to discipleship meant there would be a tremendous change of life for them. Jesus ended the sermon with sayings that warn about the sense of urgency of living as disciples. One of my favorite commentary writers says it like this, "I call you to live your lives out of an alternative vision of reality. I call you to live your lives as lives that reverse

the values of this culture. I call you to love your enemy; turn the other cheek; give your possessions to those in need and judge not the lives of others. Be merciful even as I am merciful. I have come to nourish your entire life with my mercy. I have come to empower you with mercy in order that you may, indeed, live a new kind of life in this world.”

Jesus did not say it would be easy to be Christians. He never said we would have no challenges or that we would not need to count the cost of discipleship. This is the standard our Lord set for us. If we are to love as Jesus loves, we also must do what Jesus did. AMEN