**Luke 6:27-38 February 20, 2022**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from our Gospel lesson, Luke chapter 6 here re-reading these words. “But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

 Abraham Lincoln, a President who faced unbelievable strain and turmoil in his time as United States President during the Civil War, when faced with a divided country and people who now saw themselves as enemies rather than fellow countrymen once said, “The only safe and sure way to destroy your enemy is to make him your friend.” When pressed on this statement he replied, “Madam, do I not destroy my enemies when I make them my friends?” Another time when asked how he could be so kind to his enemies Lincoln’s response was, “They are no longer my enemies, when I love them.” Jesus says, “Love your enemies.” We find it right here in Luke chapter 6. It’s not the only place we find Bible verses that talk about our relationship to our enemies, even back in the Old Testament in Proverbs 25:21- 22, “If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty give him water to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the Lord will reward you.” This verse almost seems to give the impression that the good that we do for our enemies, the love that we show to them is to destroy them as Lincoln talked about, it is simply to bring them greater guilt and pain, it’s like the ultimate ruse, it’s a switcheroo. You may think that getting back at your enemies is simply matching their hate and anger back at them, using the examples of Luke chapter 6, if they hate you, you hate them, if they curse you, you curse them, if they abuse you, you abuse them back, if they strike you, you strike them back harder, but no no no, the real revenge is being nice to them, that’s where the heaping coals really burn the hottest and the payback is the sweetest.

 But is Jesus talking about payback at all? Love is the sacrifice of yourself for the good of someone else and to love your enemy is to take the hurt that they’ve caused you, the pain, the anguish, and the justified response of payback and revenge and to set it aside. To bury the hatchet and to move on, to see them not as an enemy, but as a friend. The heaping coals are the guilt and shame that an enemy should justifiably feel for doing these wrong things to you, the realization of their wrongs and the reconciliation that can come from being faced with their wrongdoing and returning to the Lord their God. When God says to love your enemies and do good to those who hate you it is to not excuse the wrongdoing that they are doing against you, but rather to show the alternative, the love that God has called for us to show each other and the reflective life of love that we are called to live on account of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for our sin.

 These statements all paint us as the victim and others as the enemy. We can recognize the enemies in our lives, the blatant ones, the most obvious ones who hate us publicly or privately, the ones we know to avoid and that we don’t like and who don’t like us. But in our world today it is a later verse of Luke chapter 6 that has been weaponized by believers and non-believers alike to excuse any action and to paint anyone who would dare to challenge the actions of others as an enemy. To say that those who would say that something that you do is wrong is a hater, an enemy, that they are abusing you or cursing you, or seeking your destruction as an enemy would. That verse is of course the one that you probably instantly recognized from this particular section of Scripture when you heard it read, Luke chapter 6:37, “Judge not, and you will not be judged.” Judgement of others actions make you their enemy and we are called not to judge but to love, it’s right here in Luke chapter 6. So when you tell others that what they are doing is wrong you are judging them and you are wrong. When you point out that cheating and lying and hurting others is sinful, you are judging them and you are wrong and you are their enemy. This is how a friend can become an enemy rather than an enemy becoming a friend. And you’re met with the same response, Mind your own business, leave me alone, why do you care about what I do? Or even an outright quote of Jesus words, hey wait a second, I thought in the Bible it said, “Judge not, and you will not be judged.” So why are you judging me?

 An enemy judges others, puts them down, hates their lifestyles and their actions and seeks a way to make their lives miserable. They want to destroy them, so their judgement comes from an evil place. Their judgement is also hypocritical, and any judgement we offer is hypocritical as well, judgements based upon our own intellect or what we feel is right should be called out for hypocrisy because we ourselves are sinful, fallen, we make the same mistakes and who are we to judge the wrongs of other people when we ourselves have done so many things wrong. We’re sinners, our judgments are tainted with that sin and that sin influences us and what we say. If we seek only to publicly shame others and feel a sense of superiority, then we should reserve judgment and repent of only seeking to make enemies of others and not lift them up but tear them down.

 That’s our judgement though, that’s what we think, that’s different from what God says. If the Bible says that it’s wrong, and you do it, simply stating what the Bible says isn’t a judgment. It’s a fact. Facts aren’t judgments, they don’t come from a place of seeking the destruction of someone else or trying to hurt them. Facts are facts. Jumping off of a high bridge will hurt you, it may even kill you. This is a fact, it’s not a judgment. Overeating will lead to obesity and a lot of problems for your body. This is a fact. The Bible clearly outlines what is wrong in the 10 Commandments, worshipping other gods is wrong, using God’s name in vain is wrong, neglecting His Word and despising it is wrong, disrespecting authorities in your life is wrong, murder is wrong, hurting others is wrong, sexual immorality is wrong, cheating on your spouse is wrong, stealing is wrong, lying about others is wrong, coveting what others have is wrong, and these are just short simple statements from the 10 Commandments, the Bible speaks about a host of other things that are wrong. These are statements of fact, they aren’t opinions and they aren’t personal judgements. A personal judgement comes from personal preference, “I think broccoli tastes bad, I think those clothes are ugly, I didn’t like that movie, that actor is bad, their songs are bad, they shouldn’t do those things.” All of that isn’t authoritative fact it’s personal opinion, and we shouldn’t treat it as a true judgement like the facts that we find in God’s Holy Word.

 Speaking the facts isn’t seen as informative though, it’s seen as judging, and then the friend becomes the enemy, and it’s circular in that we’re supposed to love our enemies as Jesus says here, so either way the assumption is that we’ll just accept the bad behavior. My dear friends, that’s not what Jesus is saying at all. Sin can’t be excused or overlooked. The facts are the facts. This section is so particularly important because really what Jesus is talking about when he says to love your enemies is what he’s done for you. There is a lesson to be learned about how we treat others in our lives and to show them to people who are unkind to us, it’s a lesson really in the theology of the cross which focuses on how we are closer to Christ in our suffering here on Earth. Rather than prospering solely on account of our faith we rejoice even in our sufferings because they draw us closer to the cross of salvation and the work of Jesus Christ. But it’s in the cross of Jesus Christ that we see our reconciliation to God and the fact that we were born spiritually blind, spiritually dead, and spiritually opposed to God. We were born as God’s enemies. We were born into sin. We still have a heart that is inclined or drawn not to God but to sin. We are saints and sinners, and the sinner side is an enemy of God. Which means that when Jesus tell us to love our enemies he’s also illustrating to us the love that he has for us. Because while we were still sinners and his enemy, he died for us. He died for the men who jeered at him, spat on him, mocked him, beat him, hurt him, and hated him. He died for the men who schemed and plotted against him, and lied about him and got him up on that cross. He died for you, when you hate others in your heart, when you plot against your enemies and seek only revenge and payback for what they’ve done wrong against you. He dies for you, when you are faced with the facts of your sin in God’s Word and fight back against it, and hate the messengers who are simply stating the facts. He dies for his enemies then, and his enemies now. The enemies who seek to destroy the church and water it down, diluting the clear facts of God’s Word and calling them only unkind and hateful judgements. He dies for them and he dies for you. He shows the ultimate love in laying down his life for them and for you. He doesn’t just say to love your enemies, he lives it, he does it, he shows what love for your enemy looks like.

 Abraham Lincoln said, “They are no longer my enemies when I love them.” Jesus says, “Love your enemies.” This is not easy. We will fail. With man it is impossible, but not with God. The only way to show a proper love to those who hate you and hurt you is through the work of the Holy Spirit in your heart. The only place that love can come from is God. But you’ve been shown that love, and that motivates the love you show to others. God shows you a perfect love and calls you to the same standard that your faith may be strengthened and so that you one day will go to be with him in a place where there are no enemies, only friends even if at one time on Earth they were against you and your enemy. In God is the peace the world craves but can’t realize on account of sin. Be a part of the change you wish to see and that God has called for. Love your enemies, because you were God’s enemy and now you’re his child.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.