

Entering the Graciousness of God

- [Luke 6:27-38](#)

This is where the rubber hits the road isn't it? "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you." "Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned." I hardly need point out that in these times of division and name calling, Jesus' teaching is challenging and countercultural.

What are you to do about those anti-vaxxer family members, those strident Q-Anon believers whose Facebook posts you don't want to read and who you dread visiting? Jesus is pretty clear. Pray for them and do good to them. How shall we pray? Shall we pray that they see the light and stop going off the rails and ruining our democracy? No – we pray that they will receive the deepest desires of their hearts. Because the deepest desire of their hearts is the same as the deepest desires of our hearts – to be loved unconditionally and to engage in full vibrant living through the power of the Holy Spirit.

This gospel is a difficult one to preach in many ways, not least because it has been used to oppress. In my sermon preparation, I often rely on [translations from the Greek](#) offered by Mark Davis who is the pastor of a Presbyterian church in Newport Beach. Talking about this reading, Davis writes, "The challenge of preaching this text for me is to find a way of reconciling my own zero tolerance policy for abuse with Jesus' zero tolerance policy for vengeance."

So, I want to be very clear. Jesus is not saying that you should put up with abuse. If you are being abused, help is available and I encourage you to talk to me or to a trusted friend and we will support you in getting free from that situation. Much abuse is not overt and obvious. One of the terms I have learned in the past two years is "micro-aggression." Micro-aggressions are little things that you can shrug off as "he didn't really mean that" or "She

probably didn't realize what she did" but they add up. I confess that I have not always noticed or responded appropriately to micro-aggressions in this congregation and as I wrote this sermon I realized that I have sometimes looked away rather than confront people engaging in this behavior. For that I apologize.

Many scholars have argued that far from supporting abuse, Jesus is actually promoting non-violent resistance. For example, Jesus says If someone takes your coat then give them your undershirt as well. This takes the power from the aggressor who now has to decide whether to take your gift and also has to deal with the discomfort of your sudden nakedness.

Forgiveness is not an act of weakness but an act of strength. Forgiving is not rolling over and playing dead, but taking up your power because once you have *truly forgiven*, that person and their transgression no longer have the power to ruin your life. The poet [David Whyte puts it like this](#), "To forgive is to assume a larger identity than the person who was first hurt"

I have told you this teaching story at least once before, so bear with me: two monks are on a pilgrimage when they reach a wide river. On the bank is a beautiful woman waiting for someone to help her. One of the monks picks her up and carries her across. The two monks continue on their way in silence. After some time has elapsed one suddenly says, "How could you do that? How could you touch a woman like that? What about your vows?" to which the other replies, "Brother, I put her down three miles ago and you have been carrying her ever since."

Forgiveness is releasing not only the other person but ourselves from the burden of the situation. In the gospel we heard "forgive and you will be forgiven." This is the usual translation but the Greek word used has a meaning closer to "let go" or "dismiss" so it might be "release and you will be released". One version of the Lord's Prayer asks "Loose the cords of the mistakes that bind us, as we release the strands we hold of others' guilt".

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As we forgive, we let go of the transgression. It does not mean that we again put ourselves in harm’s way. It does not mean that we tolerate micro-aggressions or even macro-aggression but that we take back our power and instead of feeling that someone did us wrong, we step into the reality that we are daughters and sons of the most high, and start behaving like that.

I want to draw your attention to a question that occurs twice in this gospel reading. We heard it as “what credit is that to you?” Jesus said, "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same.”

In his translation notes, Mark Davis points out that the word rendered here as credit is more often translated as grace. So you could read it as “What grace is to you?” or even “What is grace to you?” Jesus said, "If you love those who love you, what is grace to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what is grace to you? For even sinners do the same.”

What is grace to you?

For me, this lifts the whole level of this discussion to an entirely new plane. Grace is the free gift of a loving and generous God. In Sunday School I learned that grace is God’s Riches at Christ’s Expense which focuses on the idea that we are saved through grace as a result of Christ’s death and resurrection. I now find this restrictive – I think grace is the very nature of the Godhead – it is a description of the love with which we are loved.

Think for a moment of a gracious host. A gracious host or hostess is one who makes us feel not just comfortable but special; who has thought about us in advance and anticipated our needs and wants; who never seems put out when

we spill the wine or drop a fork. God is often portrayed in scripture as a gracious host who provides a heavenly banquet for God's people.

God's grace extends to each one of us – we are welcomed like the prodigal son, we are brought into the household of God, we are fed with the food of God, we are forgiven – yes released from all our debts, real and imagined. This is grace, that God's unquenchable love surrounds each one of us. But like the best host, God is not pushy. God does not invade our space – God waits for our response to her invitation.

Grace and hospitality are very much tied up in my mind so I thought I should check the dictionary for other way of thinking about it. The online dictionary suggested “simple elegance or refinement of movement”, “courteous goodwill,” and “to do honor or credit to (someone or something) by one's presence.” Grace and beauty seem to go together – when we act with grace we bring beauty and honor to the situation, and God's presence graces everything.

And Jesus said, "If you love those who love you, what is grace to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what is grace to you? For even sinners do the same.”

This is an invitation for us to enter into God's grace and to share God's grace with others. Jesus continues, “Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.” As we enter into God's grace and extend that grace to others we will be acting as who we really are – the children of the Most High.

People of God, this is an astonishing invitation. It is not just another rule – be nice to people even if they aren't nice to you – no, it is an invitation to step into the grace of God. To be so filled with God's grace that those around us experience the very essence of God's love in us. It is an invitation to enter into

the very life of God and extend God's gracious hospitality to all beings even those who don't love us, even those who don't do good to us.

Jesus said, "If you [only] love those who love you, what is grace to you?" because grace is in God's love for **every** part of God's creation. God is inviting us to join God in that love, and who are we to turn down God's gracious invitation?