

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

<sup>27</sup>“But I say to you who are listening: Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. <sup>28</sup>Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who mistreat you. <sup>29</sup>If someone strikes you on one cheek, offer the other too. If someone takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt. <sup>30</sup>Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes away your things, do not demand them back.

<sup>31</sup>“Treat others just as you would want them to treat you. <sup>32</sup>If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? To be sure, even the sinners love those who love them. <sup>33</sup>And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? Even the sinners do the same thing. <sup>34</sup>If you lend to those from whom you expect to be repaid, what credit is that to you? Even the sinners lend to sinners in order to be paid back in full. <sup>35</sup>Instead, love your enemies, do good and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the unthankful and the evil. <sup>36</sup>Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

<sup>37</sup>“Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. <sup>38</sup>Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be poured into your lap. In fact, the measure with which you measure will be measured back to you.” **this is the Gospel of our Lord.**

**Dear Friends,**

During the days of the Revolutionary War, Washington’s men were cold, starving and sick at Valley Forge. A man by the name of Peter Miller worked hard to deliver as much relief and medical help as he possibly could to the soldiers and General George Washington considered him a great friend.

It was during this time that Peter Miller walked through the night to see the general. He was there to plead for the life of his neighbor back home, one Michael Widmon. Through some foolish act, Mr. Widmon had been found guilty of treason and sentenced to be hanged. Only Washington could grant a pardon, and a pardon is what Peter Miller sought.

Reports are that Peter Miller’s words moved Washington to tears. Nevertheless, Washington said no. After all, he said to Peter, how could he justify granting a pardon to a man just because he happens to be your friend?

What the old man said next put Peter Miller’s long walk in an entirely different light. “Friend?” he said to Washington, “Michael Widmon is not my friend. In fact, he has been my bitterest enemy.” And it was true. The townspeople knew that Widmon had taken to treating Peter Miller with contempt, even going so far as to spit in his face.

For Washington, that settled it. He granted the pardon. He granted the pardon not because Peter Miller had made the long walk for a friend. He granted the pardon because Peter Miller had made the long walk for an enemy.

As we listen to the words of Jesus this morning, he is encouraging us to love our enemies. Would you walk a long distance to plead for mercy for one of your enemies? I don't know if I would but as we consider the words of Jesus, he helps us to answer the question, **"What does Christian love look like?"** As we dig into this portion of scripture we will see, **"That it is quite different than the love of unbelievers,"** because **"It is patterned after God's love,"** and **"It comes from a truly merciful spirit."**

I. What does it mean to be a Christian? Last week we heard about the blessings of being a Christian compared to the curse of being an unbeliever. But now, how do we live as a Christian – more specifically how do we reflect the love of Christ? Jesus begins by telling us, **"Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. <sup>28</sup>Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who mistreat you."** "Love your enemies" that just goes against our human nature. Why would we want to love our enemies? Wouldn't we rather want to get even with them or even hurt them?

But Jesus says, **"I am speaking to you who are listening to me – to you who have had your hearts changed by the Holy Spirit."** That is a key part in how we look at this command of our Savior for it is the love of Christ that enables us to love our enemies. It's still not easy for us to do because we struggle with our sinful nature, but think about what Jesus did for us. Before we were brought to faith we were by nature an enemy of God. In spite of that, Jesus loved us anyway and gave his life for us. His love for us, his enemy, changed our lives and changed us from being an enemy of God to being a child of God. That is our motivation to want to love our enemies.

Jesus then continues with some examples, **"<sup>29</sup>If someone strikes you on one cheek, offer the other too. If someone takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt. <sup>30</sup>Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes away your things, do not demand them back. <sup>31</sup>Treat others just as you would want them to treat you."** My 1<sup>st</sup> thought is, won't people take advantage of me? Won't they take everything I have? But remember what our 2<sup>nd</sup> lesson, from Paul's letter to the Romans, said, **"Do not pay anyone back evil for evil. Focus on those things that everyone considers noble. <sup>18</sup>If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, maintain peace with everyone. <sup>19</sup>Do not take revenge, dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath. For it is written, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay," says the Lord. <sup>20</sup>But: If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink. For by doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head. <sup>21</sup>Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."** (Romans 12:17-21).

If we do evil to someone who has done evil to us then they will want to repay us with more evil and the cycle just goes on and on as hatred between the two individuals builds. But what happens if you repay evil with good. Break the cycle. Treat them as you would like to be treated – what are they going to do? Pay you back for being nice? How can we expect someone to show love to us if we aren't willing to show them love 1<sup>st</sup>? We all want to be treated with respect, so treat others as you want to be treated. Remember, **"We love, because he first loved us."** (1 John 4:19).

So often our motivation to do something – to help someone or show love to someone – is determined by what we might get in return. If I show love to this person will they love me back? If I help this person will I gain some kind of financial reward? Many times we ask ourselves, **“What’s in it for me?”** But in this portion of scripture, Jesus is asking us to turn that way of thinking upside down. To show love because we want to – to show love to someone because we can – to show love to someone because our Savior has shown that kind of love to us. Jesus tries to emphasize that by telling us, **“Instead, love your enemies, do good and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the unthankful and the evil. <sup>36</sup> Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”**

**II.** When we hear that phrase, **“Your reward will be great,”** we might think we have to do this to earn something but here Jesus is talking about the result of having faith and reflecting that love of Christ that comes to us through faith. Our faith, as seen in our actions, brings us the reward of heaven not our actions themselves. Some people and even some churches try to twist these words of Jesus to say that it is all about what we do and if we do what is right look what it can get us. But it is not all about what we do but what Christ has done for us – how he was perfect in every way and then was the perfect sacrifice for our sins. His love for his enemies and for us is perfect. and now in this portion of scripture he is asking us to reflect that love in all of our relationships. To love as he has loved us. That is part of being in God’s family.

It’s like when we are raising our children. We try and raise them to be kind and compassionate because that is the right thing to do. You might say that Jesus is raising or training us as a child of God to be kind and compassionate because that is the right thing to do – that is how he wants us to live our lives.

**III.** Finally Jesus sums it up by telling us, **“Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.”** We all have pride and like to think we are pretty good people but as we let our pride swell, we tend to be judgmental – to think of ourselves as being better than others. Many times we find it easy to condemn folks that get caught in wrong doing. But Jesus says to forgive as we have been forgiven.

All the things that we have been talking about – showing love to your enemies, treating people well and not expecting anything in return and trying not to be judgmental – all these things can only come as a result of recognizing Christ’s love in our lives. As we look at ourselves we have to set our pride aside and recognize that we are sinners and we prove it every day. We aren’t any better than the folks around us and sometimes we are worse. But that is why Jesus came into this world – to wash away our sins. To bring us forgiveness and to change our lives. We can only forgive because of Christ’s gift of salvation.

May we take time this week to think about the words of Jesus in this portion of scripture. May we think about what Christian love looks like and may we strive to let our actions reflect that Christian love in all we do because we have a gracious and loving Savior who loved us first and gave his life for us. Amen.