



## Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany, Feb. 23, 2025

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene  
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[Genesis 45:3-11, 15](#)

[Psalm 37:1-12, 41-42](#)

[1 Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-50](#)

[Luke 6:27-38](#)

We were never meant to be enemy to one another. Even in the most dangerous circumstances creatures can find common ground, there is a harmony built into creation, a thread, a tether - if only we are brave enough to love.

Over thirty years ago now I hit the salty waters of the Gulf of Mexico for the first time. I remember I was curious and excited to learn to tank dive. I had mastered the art of free diving shallow water and I was ready to go deeper. I was even willing to try cave diving just because I wanted to know what was down in the dark crevasses; photos weren't good enough – I wanted to see it for myself.

The beauty 60 to 70 feet under the sea is beyond words. Peaceful, rich with wonder and sometimes unimaginable if I were not seeing it with my own eyes.

I often think to myself this is how God loves.

Looking back I was paying very little attention to the risk. I also remember the moment the first shark arrived - being completely caught off guard. I'm not sure there would have been a way to prepare for that moment and all I remember was my partner signaling to stay still, check for the surface, and keep breathing. Ok I can do that. "Stay still and keep breathing – and wow, the grace and keen instinct of that animal is remarkable." In that moment I learned I can see beauty, be in awe and shudder no, more like shake uncontrollably, all at the same time. I do recall recognizing I was not alone, there was safety in my rig, in my partners nearness and in my skill and ability. Also, this animal had no interest in hurting me. That's not to say on a different day the circumstances might have been different. To this day I remain both scared and respectful of creatures that can threaten my existence -ones I would call an enemy,... **and** experiences like this one tell me I am capable of so much more when I set my curiosity free, when I allow myself to seek out beauty even in dangerous places.

What happens for you when you allow yourself a tether to safety and the right amount of freedom to be curious? As we think through the gospel we just heard try to keep that question in mind.

This chapter in Luke contains such important news about Jesus. It is worth spending a moment setting the stage for the words we hear in today's Gospel. In the words preceding our text today Jesus' ministry is on display, scrutinized, criticized and still he steps out boldly. We are in the thick of his ministry now and I am struck how Jesus is not swayed by how others view him. There is a steadfastness in his words and in his actions. When the Pharisees chastise him for allowing the disciples to pick and eat from the grain as they pass through the fields on the sabbath he continues to push back; he recalls the actions of David first eating then allowing **his** companions to eat from the bread and drink of the wine of the temple reserved only for priests. In the telling of this story Jesus provides the imagery of oneness; no separation. He holds opportunity and accountability for all and this is a fair measure of love. This begins the understanding of love as union, the capacity to hold difference and see the common good.

Yes, Jesus then heals on the Sabbath; healing brings life.

Jesus continually resists separateness; each action brings about life in and for **each** person. We learn **what** God's love looks like, **feels like** and what it can bring forth. Let's remember at what risk Jesus is declaring there be no exception; no separation.

Jesus is daring to love, to show the Father's love, in dangerous places.

This brings us to the words of today's gospel. Jesus' message here is so direct and detailed we can hardly miss it unless we were, to say, look away? Turn to check our phone? It is tempting with words so hard hitting. Jesus is speaking to God's people for paragraphs! It's not a few lines quoted or a short story - he even holds the metaphor until the end.

We are set in a moment where Jesus has chosen the 12 and declares blessing on those who are seen as least and woes those who gather and hold most.

Imagine standing in that crowd. People are gathered from Judea, Jerusalem and even the coastal regions. Healing and casting out of demons now mark Jesus' ministry. Witnessed by many, he has proclaimed by action, God's love.

Jesus begins to speak. We are likely familiar with these words but remember those surrounding Jesus are listening with wonder as he turns to the disciples as if to begin their instruction;

blessed are the poor, for they will inherit the kingdom of God,

those hungry will be satisfied,

those weeping will laugh.

We hear how all things will be turned around, turned upside down. And here we have life abundant for God's love is so big it includes all. I remind you of the setting and the preceding words because they are so important when we look at what Jesus does next. He expands his reach and we can see him speaking to all gathered. This is where he asks that we also step out boldly, for this boldness can bring about the abundance of God's love.

The words are now directed to all present- all God's people **willing to listen**.

And I'd bet those people that day were just as uncomfortable as we are hearing these words; Love your enemies. One turns to another, *how do we do that?*

Do good to those who hate you. *Are you serious?*

And this- if someone slaps you on one cheek turn to them the other also? These are hard words and they ring of resistance.

***Resistance to the power of evil and how it might be turned upside down by love.***

I do not see Jesus asking us to defy our safety. What I do see is a challenge to take risk; to show mercy and love in unimaginable places. When we look at these words Jesus calls to love all people, first by action and then by invitation.

***Though it may hurt, and it may cost, we are called to love as God loves us.***

Jesus was not intending to make love comfortable for us. He himself did not live in comfort, quite the opposite in fact. As he continues the words here on the page we are literally called out of our comfort zone.

We cannot affect change only giving to those who give first to us. We cannot move others to this abundant love if we love only to stand waiting for what is owed to us. This would be transactional, it would be conditional. What we see here in Jesus' words and actions are neither of those.

No, this love Jesus is talking about, inviting us into, is based in extending grace and mercy.

In these words we hear, "be merciful just as your father is merciful."

***What does mercy really cost us?*** I feel the deep shaking of all Jesus says here in that one question. What does mercy really cost us?

To be merciful to an enemy may feel like cost. It may even feel dangerous, not knowing what we will get in return. What if that person we see as enemy or even the one who takes from us actually needs most.

Acts of mercy might call into question pride or power, possibly material goods. We heard an excerpt from Joseph's story in our Old Testament reading. Joseph shows mercy to his brothers in extreme circumstances. Just about anything could have happened here. Certainly Joseph has cause to punish or even walk away from his brothers, he's in a position of power to do so. This leaves us wondering where he finds the strength to love so boldly. What might have convinced him to act as he did? We really have no way of knowing for sure. When Joseph speaks to the purpose to which God has called him we get a glimpse of abundance for all, including the brothers who have acted against Joseph. The vision of mercy stretches beyond - giving life to many. This story represents a lifetime and so many years to live and learn and grow. We may never see the results of our efforts and it may take a lifetime to come to terms with an enemy. And surely there will be times when we feel we don't have the strength Joseph displayed. That's when we lean.

God's mercy, grace and love is unending, limitless, abundant. This is where we find secure footing. I would offer that in these challenging words Jesus invites us to extend love in the way God loves; to stay tethered to God's love in the assurance that it does not run out. There is incredible beauty and abundance in sharing love so boldly. Jesus is not denying the danger or the cost and so we should not either. He is offering a view of humanity we have yet to experience, a peace that rests in the love of God.

Here's the verse I will remember most:

***"Give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap."***

There are times where boundaries need to be firm and I truly believe these words are not asking for us to give when we are empty. This is an invitation into the bounty. It's a good measure, a fair measure and each time we give, it is given back.

Jesus with these words is calling us to love deeply so that we may live abundantly.

Jesus asks the crowd that day and you and me right now, may we love all? Is there capacity in each of us to choose moments to look for the common thread?

Even when it's hard, even when it's risky, even when we may feel completely insecure, we can claim the assurance of God love. We are securely tethered and even in dangerous times we can be both cautious and curious how we might love in a way that turns this world upside down.

As we stand in the center of God's love may we draw upon it and give it so abundantly that even our enemies, those who scorn us, are also touched very tangibly by that divine love.. Amen.