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## The Seventh Sunday after Epiphany

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### Reactions Uncovered

Love your enemies; bless those who curse you.

In his famous Sermon on the Mount Jesus revealed the blessed life believers have as they follow Christ. But this happy and contented life does not come without discomfort and disappointment. In our upside-down life with Jesus, being blessed sometime seems like being cursed. The same phenomenon occurs as we live our lives: Jesus calls us to love our enemies and do good to those who hate us. Can such a life be blessed? In the Gospel for today Jesus says yes.

**Luke 6:27-38**

### We Live the Good Life in Love

**But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you.**

**"If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.**

**"Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."**

Introduction – There's always change with a new administration. We see it in our country every time we elect a new president. Obama departs and Trump comes on the scene and things change. Trump departs and Biden takes over and things change. Sometimes we hardly notice: Bush replaced Reagan and we hardly noticed. Biden replaces Trump and we really notice. The same thing happens in business and even in churches. There's always change with a new administration; sometimes we notice and sometimes we don't.

When Jesus began his ministry, he introduced a new administration. He called it a kingdom—he said **the kingdom of God has come near**, but this kingdom wasn't a kingdom with borders or a flag. Jesus' kingdom is essentially an administration, a way of doing things. It was a new administration, and so things were going to change. At first nobody noticed. But little by little people began to realize that this administration was very different from anything they had ever known before. We've learned that, too. Jesus' way of doing things is different from every other thing we know. We might even call it radical. Some people call it upside down. Jesus died so that we might live. That seems upside down.

We heard Jesus talking about his new administration last Sunday. Jesus said that people who follow him are blessed when they seem to be cursed. **Blessed are you who are poor**, he said. He also said that those who don't follow him are cursed when they seem to be blessed. He said, **Woe to you who are rich**. The principle that drove Jesus' administration seems upside down. Last week St. Paul was willing to live with a thorn in the flesh because—and this is what he said—

**When I am weak, then I am strong.** Life with Jesus doesn't always include good health, good wealth, and good laughs. What life with Jesus does include is genuine joy, inner contentment, and a secure future. If you remember, last week we called that the good life.

So how do we handle the good life with Jesus? How do we live each day? How do we react? In the Gospel for today Jesus picks up where he left off last week and what he tells us sounds just as crazy and just as upside down. **Love your enemies**, he says, **do good to those who hate you**. Who does that? You do, Jesus says. And he says:

**Live the Good Life in Love**

This is what love looks like

This is what love looks for

1. So I was eight and eating ice cream at my grandfather's kitchen table and I said, "I love ice cream." And this old pastor scowled at me and barked, "You can't love ice cream. You can only love God and people." He made me cry and then my grandmother scowled at him. But he was right. The Bible's idea of love isn't passion or friendship. Love in the Bible is caring about others more than you care about yourself. God loves us even though we don't deserve it; we call that grace. We reflect God's love when we love others even when they don't deserve it. That's what love looks like.

And that's what Jesus is saying here. **Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.** It's hard enough to care more about others than you care about yourself even when they care more about you than they care about themselves. I know my wife loves me, but sometimes I would rather read a book than vacuum the carpets. I knew my boys loved me, but sometimes I would have rather watched TV than play catch with them. If the boys messed up or were stubborn or disrespectful, it was harder to love them, but I still cared more about them than I did about myself. But here Jesus is laying out the extreme of love. When you live the good life with me, Jesus wants to say, you care even for those who would stab you in the back or can't stand to look at your face. You're kind even to those who curse you, and you even pray for those who make your life miserable. If God's grace for us is love we don't deserve, then our love for others is love they don't deserve.

Jesus offers some examples of how we might show that love. **If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back.** Now we have to understand something. Jesus is giving us examples of what love might do in certain situations. If you're a police officer, you don't turn the other cheek if a crook points his gun at you. If someone tries to start your house on fire, you don't stand by and watch. Christians don't need to be passive; we don't need to be pushovers. That's not Jesus' point. What Jesus means is that sometimes love acts in difficult circumstances. If someone screams at me in anger, love might let him keep screaming without screaming back. If someone takes something that's yours because he's starving or scared or freezing or in pain, love might not demand it back and love might even be ready to help with more. Love always considers the circumstances. And so Jesus added: **Do to others as you would have them do to you.** What if you were in their circumstances? What would you hope they would do for you in love?

When Jesus urges us to live the good life in love, he's asking us to take a close look at ourselves. People talk about love all the time in one way or another. But what some people call love—and what we sometimes call love—doesn't fit Jesus' upside-down principle of the good life. Sometimes love doesn't hurt, not at all. **If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full.** There's no thorn in that kind of love; no weakness there, no humility, no challenge. That isn't the kind of love that lives the good life in Christ.

2. Our love for others needs to reflect the love Jesus has for us. His love is what Jesus wants our love to look like. This is hard for us. For one thing, we're always dragging that heavy old sinful nature behind us. Our faith reaches out to love, and the sinful nature pulls us back. Faith reaches out to love, and Satan whispers, "Not them, not now." Faith reaches out to love and the people around look at us as though we're nuts. Let's admit it. Our love doesn't always look like Jesus wants it to look.

That's why we have to be looking at Jesus' love again and again. We need to see Jesus' love in his life, on his cross, and at his tomb. We need to see it in his Word and his sacraments. We need to see it in his pardon and his power and his promises. Jesus says that here: When you **love your enemies**, when you **do good to them**, when you **lend to others without expecting to get anything back**, then you are seeing the love of **the Most High who is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked**. When you are **merciful** to others, then you are seeing the love of your **Father who is merciful to you**. St. John wrote in his first Letter: **This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.**

So this is what love in the good life looks like. It's a constant reflection of God's love for us. It's like a wheel that goes around and around: God's love and our love, God's love and our love, God's love and our love. And so our love is always looking for God's love. God does not judge us and we do not judge others. God does not condemn us and we do not condemn others. God forgives us and we forgive one another. God gives to us and we give to one another. **Love in the good life may seem upside down, but it is really back and forth**—a constant reflection and a constant reaction to the constant love of Jesus. In this good life of love, Jesus says, **Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High**. In this life of love God's gifts are great: **A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you**. In the good life with Jesus our apron is filled with the good grain of God's grace. And the more you live in this life of love, the more you'll enjoy it with its genuine happiness, its inner contentment, and its certain future. And that's what love looks for. Amen.