

Luke 6:27-38

“Unjust Love”

Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany

February 24, 2019

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church

Vicar Otterman

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God, Our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

**[Introduction: Love]**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ.

The world is filled with pain, heartache, illness, and war. It is an inescapable fact that we are surrounded by evil. The existence of evil and suffering has led many philosophers, political thinkers, and religious leaders to ask the question, “What can be done about the problem of evil?”

One of the most common answers given to this question in the last several decades is ‘love’. Just think of all the musicians who have written songs about how the world’s problems would be solved if only people would just love one another. From the Beatles to Bob Marley to Michael Jackson, many songs have been written about the need for love in order to stop the cycle of evil and suffering in the world.

The famous Beatles lyrics, “All you need is love,” has rung throughout the nations and struck a chord with people everywhere who are hoping for a better world.

But in the mission to create a world filled with love, humanity has encountered a major obstacle. Justice.

**[Justice]**

Justice is what is required when people hurt one another. It’s a payment for wrongdoing. The call in our society for people to love one another is strong, but the call for justice is stronger.

Human love can only go so far when it comes in conflict with justice. When a person is robbed of their property, their family, their health, or their good name, justice demands some form of recompense.

To deny justice would be unthinkable. The desire for justice is written deep within the human heart, which is why we see people everywhere demanding it. Just turn on the national news or scroll down your Facebook page. There is a new scandal around every corner with people calling for justice.

Human love does not often penetrate the need for justice. We hear the call to love one another, but it only seems to count when the other person deserves it.

If we ignored the pain and suffering of a victim in order to offer love and forgiveness to their oppressor that would be seen as a terrible evil. It would belittle the suffering experienced by the victim. Justice demands a payment.

Thus, it is impossible for the world to love everyone, because according to human justice, those who hurt us deserve punishment, not love. To the world, the actual act of loving one's enemies is an unjust sort of love.

### **[Unjust Love]**

That's why the kind of love that Jesus teaches is so radical. It sets aside justice for the sake of love. In today's Gospel reading, Jesus says, "love your enemies." He calls us to do what the rest of the world is unwilling to do. "Do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you." (*Luke 6:27-28*)

### **[Imagine...]**

To the rest of the world, truly loving one's enemies is unimaginable. The very thought offends our sense of justice. But Jesus teaches us what love really looks like and commands us to live it out.

So let's take a moment and imagine a world where people chose to defend the honor of those who lie and gossip about them, always putting the best construction on a situation.

Imagine a world where people chose to give generously to those who have stolen from them.

Imagine a world where husbands and wives chose to love and honor each other, even when their partner fails to love and honor them.

Imagine a world where people chose to honor and cherish their political leaders, praying for them and encouraging them, even if they didn't vote for them.

You might think this sounds like a dream, but Jesus has already made this kind of love into a reality. For with God all things are possible, and this radical and unjust kind of love is exactly the way that Jesus loves us.

### **[God's Enemies]**

The human heart is set against God. When sin entered the world, humanity literally became God's enemies.

We disobey God's Word when we ignore His will for us.

We slander God by calling him a liar with our actions and our words.

We steal from God when we chose not to give him praise and thanks.

We commit adultery against God when we trust in worldly things more than we trust in Him.

We covet against God when we try to replace His will with our own will.

We are guilty of murdering God in our hearts when we turn against him in anger. And 2000 years ago, people actually did murder God when they hung His only Son on a cross to die.

By all rights, we were God's enemies. God made us so that we could live in a loving relationship with him, but we refused. He called us again and again, and each time we betrayed him and kept our love for ourselves. The world's greatest injustice is that humanity has not paid for its crimes against God in full. And the full payment is more than we can afford, for the wages of sin is death. (***Romans 6:23***)

### **[*God's Love*]**

But in His mercy, God sets aside justice for our sake.

God's love for us is unjust according to earthly standards. The rest of the world says, 'Become lovable so I can love you.' But God chose to love us even when we were unlovable.

Paul writes in ***Romans 5:8***, "For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

Jesus' command to love our enemies isn't based on an ideology, a dream, or someone's imagination. It's based on his own love for us. Even when we were sinners, he loved us. Even now when we fail to love one another, he still loves us.

We get to love our enemies, because that's what Jesus did for us on the cross. It's what God has always done for his people. The day Adam and Eve committed the

first sin, humanity deserved to die, to disappear off the face of the earth. But God was merciful. He loved His people despite the demands of justice.

The answer to the question, “What can be done about the problem of evil?” has already been answered. Death, the threat of evil, has already been nailed to the cross and buried in the grave.

We have received mercy, and so we live according to that mercy, loving even our enemies and awaiting the day when Christ returns and abolishes the remnants of evil forever. Amen.

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“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

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