

February 20, 2022

Luke 6:27-38

# “The Deep Love of Jesus”

Pilgrim Lutheran Church  
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

An Armenian nurse had been held captive along with her brother by the Turks. Her brother was slain by a Turkish soldier, right before her eyes. Somehow, she escaped and, later, became a nurse in a military hospital.

One day, she was stunned to find that the same man who had killed her brother had been captured and brought, wounded, to the hospital where she worked. Something within her cried out, "Vengeance!" But, a stronger voice called for her to love. She nursed the man back to health.

Finally, the recuperating soldier asked her, "Why didn't you let me die?" Her answer was, "I am a follower of Him who said, 'Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you.'" Impressed with her answer, the young soldier replied, "I never heard such words before. Tell me more. I want this kind of religion."

What a witness! Can you imagine nursing back to life a person who cruelly took the life of someone you loved? Can you imagine being the person who mercilessly killed another only to realize that his sister, who saw the whole thing, is now lovingly and carefully tending to your wounds to keep you alive? Love like that has a way of making incredible changes in people. This is **The Deep Love of Jesus**.

More often than not, we want to hurt people who have done horrible things to us. We want to give them the pain that they gave us. The idea of being kind to them goes against every bone in our body. But we come to these opening words of Jesus in our Gospel lesson for this morning: "But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you."

Those are tough words to hear - hard words to swallow. Am I to really love people who aren't kind to me and who are vehemently opposed to who I am and what I believe? Am I to love people who have hurt and even harmed me and the people I love? This is **The Deep Love of Jesus**. So how deep is your love?

I would suspect that probably most of us would prefer to avoid that question. But the truth of the matter is that we need to face it. However, we need to face it in a very special way if we hope for our love to become deep like his. And the place where we should begin are these words of the apostle Paul in Romans 5:8-11. Listen carefully:

God shows his love for us in that *while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if *while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son*, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Did you absorb those words into your heart? "... while we were still sinners, Christ died for us ... while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son ..." It is here that the truth of the whole matter hits us as hard as we can be hit. We are the sinners and we are the enemies.

In deep love the sinless Son of God became one of us. Jesus lived and suffered and died for sinners. Jesus lived and suffered and died for his enemies. He saved those who hated him and abused him and caused him to suffer and die on the cross. He is there because of us. And this is what we must understand in the highest sense. We are those sinners and enemies who placed on his head the crown of thorns, who nailed his hands and feet to the tree, and who thrust the spear into his body that his blood and water might save us from ourselves. Our sins and death killed the Son of God that we might have forgiveness and life. **The Deep Love of Jesus** is simply as the hymn says: "For us by wickedness betrayed, For us, in crown of thorns arrayed, he bore the shame of cross and death; for us He gave His dying breath."

This kind of deep love, when it touches us and we receive it for what it really is somehow overturns our hatred and hostility and desire to rid ourselves of Jesus and his holiness. Love works to extinguish in us our alienation and hostility toward him. Through Christ we have been reconciled to God. Peace comes to us by the blood of his cross. This peace overturns alienation and hostility since we have been reconciled in the forgiveness of sins and granted eternal life. By faith in Jesus and all that he so graciously gives, we are presented holy and blameless and even above reproach.

When **The Deep Love of Jesus** comes into our lives, we then perceive that our own personal enemies are also the object of God's love in Jesus' sacrifice. All of the sudden we realize that our enemies also stand beneath the cross of Christ as we do. Jesus loved his enemies. He loved us. And those whom we perceive as being our enemies, he also loved unto death.

Because Christ loved us as sinners and enemies we are enabled to love our enemies too. We do so because we realize that behind all of the sin and hostility and desire to hurt and harm someone is a person who is no different than us in how we were sinners and enemies of Jesus. We all have one thing in common. We crucified Jesus. In this way our enemies turn into lost souls that are headed to death and hell, as we once were. We have been rescued and in that kind of deep love of Jesus we want others to be rescued. Here we can see just how horrible it is that we would wish everlasting hell on someone. We would never want that for ourselves. Thank you Jesus for saving us as sinners and enemies!

He who visited us with his tender compassion wells up within us a compassion like his. We learn of "his love, its length and breadth, Its fullness, depth, and height." And, as our sermon hymn stated, we also learn to sing to one another, "Then walk in love as Christ has loved, Who died that He might save; With kind and gentle hearts forgive As God in Christ forgave." And that brings us to the rest of our Gospel lesson for this morning. In **The Deep Love of Jesus** we rise up and go forth in faith and live that faith in face of our enemies who do evil against us. Our Gospel lesson gives to us 16 commands in three sections with three summary commands at the end of each of the three sections. Those three summary commands state: "And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them ... Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful ... give, and it will be given to you."

This is exactly how Joseph in our Old Testament lesson was toward his brothers who hated him and who were at first going to kill him but later chose to sell him into slavery only then tell Jacob that he was dead. You want to talk about enemies! His own brothers did everything to destroy him. But listen to these incredible words of Joseph that capture so much of what we have already said. We heard the whole thing in our Old Testament lesson for today, but listen to these selected portions of Joseph's words to his enemies, his own brothers:

Come near to me, please ... do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life ... to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors ... God has made me master of all Egypt. Come down to me; do not tarry. You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children ... There I will provide for you ... And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them. After that his brothers talked with him.

Notice that Joseph draws his enemies close to himself. What his enemies have done to him have given him a chance to declare God's salvation to them. He is merciful in the highest, for he sees their predicament and does something about it. The Lord has given Joseph great gifts that enable him to care for his enemies. Joseph loves his enemies to such an extent that they end up talking with him. This love of Joseph was only because he himself had been loved by the deep love of his Savior.

So, again I ask, how deep is your love? It's still a tough question. But I pray that it has become easier to answer after what we have considered this day. And I pray that **The Deep of Love** of Jesus will grow all the more in you in the days to come. May it be as it says in 1 John 4:19, "we love because he first loved us."

Pastor Brock Abbott