



Seventh Sunday after Epiphany Sunday, February 24th, 2019

Beyond Redemptive Violence: A Jubilee Ethics of Release



These last weeks during Epiphany, we have been focusing upon the sequential readings from the Gospel of Luke, where we have been able to construct a step-by-step understanding of what I have referred to as the “Culture of God”, which helps us understand what the mission of the church should look like. To Christians who reduce mission to “discipling”, there is a lot to learn. It is not that discipling is wrong – in fact it is crucial – but the point is what does “following” Jesus actually mean? The readings of the past few Sundays from Luke tell us clearly that to follow Jesus is about living in a particular way: giving expression to a particular world-view (the Kingdom), putting into practice values that derive from the Hebrew “Jubilee”. This is hard stuff: discipling is about conversion *to a way of life* that is challenging and disturbing, not just to a “God-man” who we then manipulate – consciously and un-consciously – into our own image and preferences.

Today, we come to the ethics of the follower of Jesus. Often, they are discounted as hopelessly pacifistic, idealistic and impractical, caving in to injustice. They are not! While they are non-violent, they nevertheless disturb and up-end injustice and abuse, when employed with wisdom and courage.

GATHERING

Welcome

In the name of God
 In the name of the Son
 In the name of the Holy Spirit

The Lord be with
And also with you

Let's Sing: Fairest Lord Jesus (TiS 203, St Elizabeth, Anon)

Introduction

Opening Prayers:

We continue to use Japanese haiku structure for poems: the first and third lines with five syllables and the middle line with seven. Here we focus on today's Gospel passage from Luke: Jesus' teachings about ethics, that follow directly on from the Sermon on the Plain of which we heard last Sunday.

***Love your enemies:
 surely the most laughable
 of all his commands.***

Easily dismissed
 when fear is cultivated
 to harvest power.

The title, 'Christian,'
 becomes robbed of its meaning
 by those who must hate.

Bless those who curse you,
 pray for those who abuse you.
 More futile commands.

Even bad people
 love those who return their love;
 be better than that!

Would you follow him;
this man who insists on love
ahead of all else?

Real love is one-way,
not a bargain or a deal,
expects no return.

Generous, like God,
love is extended to all;
you don't pick and choose.

Don't be judgmental,
don't condemn those who fall short,
practice forgiveness.

***When it comes to love,
aim high, and don't be afraid
to fail, says Jesus.***

Amen

The Peace

The Young People leave for SMG

LET'S HEAR THE WORD

Some Thoughts around Violence, Pacifism and Forgiveness (Release)

Joseph exercised Pharaoh's generosity as though he had never undergone any of the experiences which led him to his position. He was so entirely free of any sort of resentment that he was able to imagine an entirely generous and sustained program for the reconciliation of his brothers, and act it out in such a way that they

were eventually *able to get the point*, overcome their fratricide and be reconciled.

James Alison, Faith Beyond Resentment

The first and second sections of Jesus' teachings to his followers, The Sermon on the Plain... "Blessed are the poor" (6:20-26) and his new ethics... "Love your enemies" (6:27-38) set in place the two principles that pose stumbling blocks for most modern Christians: the repudiation of privilege based on wealth and the repudiation of retaliation that spawns violence. These principles are diametrically opposed to the assumptions of the marketplace and the media that shape American, indeed western culture: The wealthy are privileged, and conflict requires that one show strength through retaliation. Our heroes, therefore, are usually neither poor nor non-violent. As a result, the power of materialism and the fight for possessions have increased dramatically during this century and violence in our homes, schools, and streets is rampant. Jesus' alternative is not sheer passivity but aggressive action to undermine hostility and violence. He taught a new attitude toward possessions and persons in need and a new response to hostility. [p. 149]

RA Culpepper, The Gospel of Luke, New Interpreter's Bible

Genesis 45: 1-11,15 (Good News Translation) Jeanette Barrett

Genesis 45 is the climax of the story of Joseph. It contains high drama, overpowering emotion, deep contrition, and a further glimpse of God's direction of his people. Today's reading sees the resolution of the family events recounted over the last seven chapters. Through jealousy and hatred toward Joseph his brothers had sold him into slavery. In the story Joseph is taken to Egypt and sold there, but through several fortuitous events he rises to the highest of places in the Egyptian government. In the process of meeting after a long separation, the brothers undergo a difficult reckoning within their own lives. In Gen 44:16, as the brothers return to Egypt a second time, they proclaim: 'God has found out (our) guilt', referring to what they did to Joseph back in Genesis 37. Their change of heart and confession are exemplified in the episodes to follow. This story does not support a superficial faith which naively sees God as either the puppeteer behind all human events or the one whose will is to be slavishly sought before any human action is undertaken. Nor does it support a sceptical faith that ultimately sees history as chaos. This story presumes a faith in which the sovereignty and activity of God is seen as tightly bound to human agendas, yet at the same time possessing a freedom within certain bounds. God's purposes are worked out with his creation, but in a way which exhibits forgiveness, vulnerability and compassion. In that commitment there is hope for the divine promise for all creation.

45 Joseph was no longer able to control his feelings in front of his servants, so he ordered them all to leave the room. No one else was with him when Joseph told his brothers who he was. ² He cried with such loud sobs that the Egyptians heard it, and the news was taken to the king's palace. ³ Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?" But when his brothers heard this, they were so terrified that they could not answer. ⁴ Then Joseph said to them, "Please come closer." They did, and he said, "I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. ⁵ Now do not be upset or blame yourselves because you sold me here. It was really God who sent me ahead of you to save people's lives. ⁶ This is only the second year of famine in the land; there will be five more years in which there will be neither ploughing nor reaping. ⁷ God sent me ahead of you to rescue you in this amazing way and to make sure that you and your descendants survive. ⁸ So it was not really you who sent me here, but God. He has made me the king's highest official. I am in charge of his whole country; I am the ruler of all Egypt.

⁹ "Now hurry back to my father and tell him that this is what his son Joseph says: 'God has made me ruler of all Egypt; come to me without delay. ¹⁰ You can live in the region of Goshen, where you can be near me—you, your children, your grandchildren, your sheep, your goats, your cattle, and everything else that you have. ¹¹ If you are in Goshen, I can take care of you. There will still be five years of famine; and I do not want you, your family, and your livestock to starve.'"

¹⁵ Then, still weeping, he embraced each of his brothers and kissed them. After that, his brothers began to talk with him.

1 Corinthians 15:35-50 (Good News Translation)

This reading follows on from last week's and involves the same theme which Paul labours with this Corinthian community – possibly the most difficult of Christian communities with which he had to work, marked by their arrogance and ignorance: they often go together. The Corinthians saw themselves as *above the physical*; they considered themselves "people of the Spirit" to whom embodied reality meant little. A sociological reading of Corinthians, suggests also that they were people of resources, who could afford to despise physical reality, precisely because they 'had it all'. In this part of his letter, Paul takes them to task correcting their 'spiritual' value system, as he works back from death and the after-life to this life. In essence he speaks of a spiritual body, post mortality, and the point is that after death there *is* a body, not just a bodiless soul, as Plato had thought, and as many modern Christians still think today. The issue here is that those who, like the Corinthians, equate the after-life with a disembodied

reality, will also in all likelihood – as the Corinthians did – not take seriously, the physical reality *this side of the grave* either. What distinguishes ancient Hebrew from ancient Greek thought, is precisely the high value placed upon, embodied reality: the body, society, and politics.

³⁵ Someone will ask, “How can the dead be raised to life? What kind of body will they have?” ³⁶ You fool! When you plant a seed in the ground, it does not sprout to life unless it dies. ³⁷ And what you plant is a bare seed, perhaps a grain of wheat or some other grain, not the full-bodied plant that will later grow up. ³⁸ God provides that seed with the body he wishes; he gives each seed its own proper body.

⁴² This is how it will be when the dead are raised to life. When the body is buried, it is mortal; when raised, it will be immortal. ⁴³ When buried, it is ugly and weak; when raised, it will be beautiful and strong. ⁴⁴ When buried, it is a physical body; when raised, it will be a spiritual body. There is, of course, a physical body, so there has to be a spiritual body. ⁴⁵ For the scripture says, “The first man, Adam, was created a living being”; but the last Adam is the life-giving Spirit. ⁴⁶ It is not the spiritual that comes first, but the physical, and then the spiritual. ⁴⁷ The first Adam, made of earth, came from the earth; the second Adam came from heaven. ⁴⁸ Those who belong to the earth are like the one who was made of earth; those who are of heaven are like the one who came from heaven. ⁴⁹ Just as we wear the likeness of the man made of earth, so we will wear^[a] the likeness of the Man from heaven.

⁵⁰ What I mean, friends, is that what is made of flesh and blood cannot share in God's Kingdom, and what is mortal cannot possess immortality.

The word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

Luke 6:27-38 (J.B. Phillips New Testament) Emily Jacobsson

Last week we had the opening verses of the great block of teaching from Luke: the Sermon on the Plain, which is the Lukan version of Matthew's Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7) While there are similarities there are also great differences, with Luke's interpretation focused upon the brutal materiality of poverty and suffering, understood to be in part, the result of the concentration of wealth and power in few hands. This week we move onto Luke's reading of what Christian ethics look like. What we need to remember here is that these ethics, are to be interpreted and understood in the light of

what Luke has already written: his focus upon the Jubilee and his rigorous treatment of unjust social and economic systems in what we considered last week: the Sermon on the Plain. In other words, these ethics listed today, are to be read in the light of reality, not just through an idealistic lens.

²⁷⁻²⁸ “But I say to all of you who will listen to me: love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who treat you badly.

^{29a} “As for the man who hits you on one cheek, offer him the other one as well!

^{29b-30} And if a man is taking away your coat, do not stop him from taking your shirt as well. Give to everyone who asks you, and when a man has taken what belongs to you, don’t demand it back.”

³¹ “Treat men exactly as you would like them to treat you.”

³²⁻³⁵ “If you love only those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them! And if you do good only to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that, And if you lend only to those from whom you hope to get your money back, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners and expect to get their money back. No, you are to love your enemies and do good and lend without hope of return. Your reward will be wonderful and you will be sons of the most high. For he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked!

³⁶ “You must be merciful, as your father in Heaven is merciful.”

³⁷⁻³⁸ “Don’t judge other people and you will not be judged yourselves. Don’t condemn and you will not be condemned. Make allowances for others and people will make allowances for you. Give and men will give to you—yes, good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over will they pour into your lap. For whatever measure you use with other people, they will use in their dealings with you.”

Their ancestors said the very same things about the false prophets.

The Gospel of the Lord

Praise to you Lord Christ

Meditative Hymn: Jesus Christ is Waiting (TiS 665, Noël Nouvelet, John L. Bell)

A Film Clip – Popeye at his Best

In this scene, Popeye proves his mettle, dispatching the “bad guy” with the help of his ever available can of spinach, which contains potassium, magnesium, vitamins B6, B9, E, K, folic acid, calcium, carotenoids and of course iron.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=20FhxjCaSEk>

Some thoughts...

Let's Give

Doxology

***Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,
praise him, all creatures here below,
praise him above, ye heavenly host,
praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.***

Prayer of Dedication

Prayers of the People

Rob Mayrick

The one who prays offers the following words at the end of each series of petitions, “May our prayers feed our actions”. The people respond, “May our actions confirm our words”.

Hymn: Lift up your hearts unto the Lord (TiS 732, Sing Alleluia, Linda Stassen-Benjamin)

“As for the man who hits you on one cheek, offer him the other one as well!

It is only by listening to what we say about God,
and to how what is said, ties in with what we do,
that Christian faith carries credibility

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord

In the name of Christ

Amen

We sing: May the feet of God (TiS 779, Aubrey, Aubrey Podlich)

Closing Postlude

Organist:

Tony Ireland