

## SCRIPTURE READINGS AND SERMON

### Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany

February 20, 2022

#### Psalm 103:1–13 (ESV):

1 Bless the LORD, O my soul,

and all that is within me,

bless his holy name!

2 Bless the LORD, O my soul,

and forget not all his benefits,

3 who forgives all your iniquity,

who heals all your diseases,

4 who redeems your life from the pit,

who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,

5 who satisfies you with good

so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

6 The LORD works righteousness

and justice for all who are oppressed.

7 He made known his ways to Moses,

his acts to the people of Israel.

8 The LORD is merciful and gracious,

slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

9 He will not always chide,

nor will he keep his anger forever.

10 He does not deal with us according to our sins,

nor repay us according to our iniquities.

11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth,

so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;

12 as far as the east is from the west,

so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

13 As a father shows compassion to his children,  
so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.

**1<sup>st</sup> Scripture Reading: Jeremiah 17:5–8 (ESV):**

5 Thus says the LORD:

“Cursed is the man who trusts in man  
and makes flesh his strength,  
whose heart turns away from the LORD.

6 He is like a shrub in the desert,  
and shall not see any good come.

He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness,  
in an uninhabited salt land.

7 “Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD,  
whose trust is the LORD.

8 He is like a tree planted by water,  
that sends out its roots by the stream,  
and does not fear when heat comes,  
for its leaves remain green,  
and is not anxious in the year of drought,  
for it does not cease to bear fruit.”

**EPISTLE: 1 Corinthians 15:21–26; 30-42 (ESV):**

21 For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.  
22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. 23 But each in his own  
order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. 24 Then comes  
the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and  
every authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under  
his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

30 Why are we in danger every hour? 31 I protest, brothers, by my pride in you, which I  
have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die every day! 32 What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I

fought with beasts at Ephesus? If the dead are not raised, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.” 33 Do not be deceived: “Bad company ruins good morals.” 34 Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning. For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame.

### **The Resurrection Body**

35 But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?” 36 You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. 37 And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. 38 But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. 39 For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. 40 There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another. 41 There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.

42 So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable.

### **Gospel: Luke 6:27–38 (ESV):**

#### **Love Your Enemies**

**27** “But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, **28** bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. **29** To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. **30** Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. **31** And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.

**32** “If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. **33** And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. **34** And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. **35** But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. **36** Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.

## Judging Others

**37** “Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; **38** give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.”

## Sermon 8 – Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany

### “Create in Me”

#### Luke 6:27-38

Dear friends,

Continuing through the Gospel of Luke leads us to one of the most counter-intuitive and difficult attitude shifts that Jesus commands of us. We know we as Christians are supposed to stand out, we are not supposed to be like the world, we are supposed to be different. It is a fair question to ask, how do we stand out? Jesus tells us one of the key ways here. Besides standards, this is both an incredibly threatening statement and also a wonderfully reassuring one. It seems like those things should be mutually exclusive, but Jesus ensures that both of them are upheld with all their strength, and I'm going to try to do the same.

This chapter starts with a couple of different instances of Jesus breaking the Sabbath. Jesus is called out for this by the Pharisees, and Jesus takes the opportunity to point out the hypocrisy in their criticisms. He points out the utter uselessness of them nitpicking things like they did, by their criticism itself, the Pharisees are showing how catastrophically they have missed the point. This later feeds into what Jesus is going to teach here and what He is going to teach other places. He is the point. Jesus is always the point, and Jesus explains later *why* He is always the point. Before He gets to that, though, He has this to say.

**27** “But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, **28** bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. **29** To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not

**withhold your tunic either. 30 Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. 31 And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.**" Who can do this? If the cost is easy, its easy, but who can really do this? Have you tried? I have. It sounds easy, it rolls off the tongue well, but it is next to impossible. When someone takes something from you, let them. Pray for them. Treat them like a brother. When someone hurts you, open your heart to them again. Forgiveness is the burying of sin together with Christ into the grave. Christ went into the grave, your sins go into the grave. Forgiveness toward our neighbor is taking our neighbor's sin and burying that sin with Christ, never to rise again. Never to be brought up again. Never to be relevant to our life again. Sometimes we have to do this multiple times a day, because the hurt runs so deep. Forgiveness means it is as gone and dead as Christ was in the tomb, and forgiveness isn't just about hurt, Jesus says. It is also about loss. Whether loss of things, or loss of people, or loss of opportunities, the world will take from you. People will take from you. Jesus' instructions are mercilessly clear here: Let them take from you, then keep giving to them. Then pray for them.

How? How is this possible? In my experience, forgiveness and unforgiveness are habits. Like any habit, we try to feed the good habits and starve the bad habits. Forgiveness is a good habit, unforgiveness, bitterness, is a bad habit. When you feed bitterness, it gets bigger. Stronger. The longer you hate, the harder it is to get out of that hate. The more you feed forgiveness, the easier it is to forgive the next time. It is Christ who makes this possible. By His sacrifice He transforms your hearts, and you can either take advantage of that transformation and try to exercise the muscles of forgiveness, or not, and retreat back into unforgiveness. He makes it so that we might fight this war, and it is a war, one the devil will not let go without a fight. The devil wants us crouched in our little corners, sharpening our hates, feeding our resentments. Don't listen to Him. Listen to Christ instead, who invites you into the way of life, the way of letting go. We feed our Christian faith by hearing the words of God and by trying to exercise those words in our lives. That is why it is so darn hard. Everything you are, everything you believe, demands

that you square the deal, that you give back to those that hurt you. That you get back what you've lost. Those demands are lies.

Forgiveness is far more than a good habit. It is the cornerstone and bedrock of every relationship, and it is the currency of Christian living. We Christians should spend our forgiveness as freely as we spend money. We should be generous with our stuff, sure, but being generous with our mercy, with our willingness to forgive, is so much more meaningful and valuable, both to ourselves and to others. Christ shames us with His words here.

**32 “If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. 33 And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. 34 And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. 35 But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. 36 Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.”** That last part hit me hard. You should be kind to the *ungrateful and the evil*. He puts those two things in the same sentence and the same category. Why? Because Christ is. This reminds us that we are both. We are ungrateful, and that means we are evil. Near the end of his life on this earth, Luther wrote that Christian faith would be taken from Germany. He predicted that Germans would no longer tolerate Christian truth or Christian preaching. Why? Not because of immorality, not because of a secular society or too much wealth or whatever. Because of unthankfulness. Unthankfulness, to Luther, was enough to poison an entire people group against the Christian faith, and he was right! Unthankfulness is a poison. It fills our hearts with bitterness, spite, and entitlement. That was what the Pharisees did, which I think accounts for why this chapter begins with Jesus' disagreements with them. Unthankfulness, unforgiveness, these things will lead you down the path to becoming Pharisees.

That's hard to hear, because we're all guilty of, at times, hard and entitled hearts. This is why we must seek new hearts through repentance, through bringing our

unthankfulness, our bitterness to Him and asking forgiveness for it. That forgiveness is always given, it never fails us, and because He shows that forgiveness to us, we can show that forgiveness to each other. It is never complete, and our hearts will never be fully clean from it, but it is Christ's and it is there and it is a weapon that we can use every hour of every day. Be merciful, because Christ is merciful to you. The devil wants you to think that those words are condemnation. He'll get your dander up first, make you mad at God or whoever, then hit you with guilt because he can rightfully accuse you of not following Christ's rules. Then he can hit you with despair, making you feel like it doesn't matter, nothing matters, because nothing ever changes. It is a merry-go-round that has no end, but what Christ promises here is *the end* to it. He is the end of guilt. He is the end of bitterness. He is the end of it all, because He takes all those things from us. The heart remains sinful as it always will, but we have a new heart in there. This heart wants all these things, not just for ourselves, but for our neighbor as well. This is why we reach out in compassion and forgiveness when the rest of the world judges, condemns, and demands payback. This is why we love our neighbor even when he takes and hurts us. We did those things to Christ, and He loved us anyway, and He made us love just like He did.

With man it is impossible. With God all things are possible, and God makes this possible within us every time we repent of our unkindness and ungratefulness. Sometimes we feed it, and get some traction. Sometimes we fall back into the same old pattern, believing the same old lies. Neither changes what Christ can make us and has made us here today. We are miserly with our mercy. Christ is not. He is generous, and His generosity can transform, change, make new out of the old, spiteful, withered hearts we have.

**37 “Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; 38 give, and it will be given to you.”** To my ears that standard sounds like doom. It sounds like a death sentence. Christ reminds us that He is there with us, every day, to interrupt that doom. To take that death sentence for us. He died for our judgments, our superiority, our entitlement. He died for our unthankfulness, our bitterness, our hearts that scream “you owe me.” He died break

those hearts within us and give us a new heart, God's heart. One that shows mercy. One that starts each day new, forgetting the old, pressing toward what is ahead. Don't hang on to your old heart. It is a liar, telling you that you deserve when you don't deserve anything but hell. It is a thief, stealing your joy, your faith, and replacing them with despair and unbelief. Give it to God instead. Tell Him to give you a new heart. He will.

Amen.