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St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church  
7<sup>th</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany/Year C  
February 24, 2019  
Text: Luke 6:27-38

In today's gospel, the Sermon on the Plain continues. If we remember last week's gospel and the one before that and the one before that, Jesus has turned human thinking upside down. From the very beginning when he made his first public appearance in his hometown synagogue, Jesus was quick to upset the apple cart by making it clear to his listeners that God has a different agenda for humankind, that the way things were, are not what will always be. The poor, the captive, the blind, and the oppressed would all have a different song to sing and those who had little to nothing by the world's standards would be blessed beyond measure in the Kingdom of God. And most importantly, Jesus came to earth to show humankind how to mirror God's intent for us-and that is, to love as God loves.

Often times Jesus asked much from those who followed him. This segment of his sermon is particularly challenging as he says:

- Love your enemy and do right by those who hate you even pray for them
- If someone strikes you on the cheek, turn give them the other
- If someone takes your coat, give them your shirt too
- Give your stuff away to everyone who asks
- Forgive and do not judge
- And if we didn't hear it the first time: Love your enemy

We can only imagine the crowd's reaction. And you and I hear this and we think: 'Be realistic, Jesus! It all sounds nice but love my enemy? Turn the other cheek? Give my possessions away? Forgive Lola even though she put all my stuff out there for everyone to hear? She's put it all over Facebook and Twitter! And the thing about "Do to others as you would have them do to you?" Seriously? What happened to our way of solving issues: an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth? Jesus, you are really asking an awful lot here! And if this is a test Jesus, well, I have all but failed.'

Still Jesus rejects the common way of thinking and insists that there is a better way of us being in relationship one to the other. He called his disciples and

he calls us to a higher standard. Why? So that humankind can mirror the God who created us, blessed sinners and saints alike.

In this morning's collect we prayed: "O Lord, you have taught us that without love whatever we do is worth nothing; Send your Holy Spirit and pour into our hearts your greatest gift, which is love, the true bond of peace and of all virtue..." Love is the call of today's gospel. LOVE.

Brothers and sisters, as our Presiding Bishop Michael Curry often says: "We serve a God of love. God is love." How can we not love and do right by others if we are each made in the image of the God of love and who is love? Jesus says to us: "But I say to you that listen..." Listen, be like God who loves and blesses, is forgiving and merciful. He reminding us of who we already are-people who are made in God's image and likeness. This is something that you and I and the rest of the world need to be reminded of every day.

Jesus says that for every act of hate-show love. To every person in need-show compassion. For every unkind act or word or judgment-do not give that back in kind. Instead, show your brother, your sister, your neighbor and your enemy, the face of Jesus. Help turn the world upside down so all can see and experience our Creator God and the Kingdom of God right here on earth.

His mandate is about each of us striving to become who we are meant to be. We are meant to be reflections of God's love and grace, mirrors of God's mercy, compassion and forgiveness. We are meant to live into our identities as blessed and beloved daughters and sons of God who work toward dispelling the darkness that we too often find in today's world. As the late Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that." We are to be followers of Christ who seek to fiercely love others including our enemies because we are so fiercely loved by God and because as Paul said in his Letter to the Church of Corinth, "we also bear the image of the man of heaven" and because as Jesus says in the gospel, He/God "is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked." And that means as disciples and followers of Jesus we are not to hold back our love. Thomas Merton who was a great monk, theologian, and social activist once wrote: "Our job is to love others without stopping to inquire whether or not they are worthy." Will it be easy? Of course not.

February, Black History Month, is quickly coming to a close. And there have been celebrations remembering African American heroes and sheroes of the

past and of the present and those yet to be born. We have celebrated and recognized that we stand on the shoulders of all those who came before us. For me that includes people like: the Rev. Absalom Jones, the first ordained African American priest of the Episcopal Church; the Rev. Dr. Pauli Murray, considered the first Black woman ordained to the Episcopal priesthood; Sr. Antona Ebo and Sr. Thea Bowman, bold and bodacious Black Catholic nuns who taught us young ones to speak God's truth. I remember and stand on the broad and strong shoulders of my mother and of the Reverends Emory Washington and of Michael Randolph and countless, countless others too numerous to name. And yes, that includes others that do not look like me. And as I attend various celebrations I raise my voice with others and sing, "*We shall overcome. We shall overcome. We shall overcome someday. Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe. We shall overcome someday.*" And I can't help but wonder (as millions of others have wondered) but especially in light of this gospel: When will that "*someday*" come? When will the love that Jesus speaks of shower down, around and among the peoples of the earth? When will that day come when there is equal liberty and justice for all? When nations will tire of war? When will that "*someday*" come? When will the poor not be seen as inferior to those who have more? When will folks not have to decide whether to get the medicines they need or put food on the table? When will enemies cease to be enemies? When will that "*someday*" come? When will acts of hatred no longer be met with more acts of hate? When will our biases and those 'isms' be buried once and for all-those isms of racism, sexism, classism, ageism and other isms that are prevalent in our society and in our Church. When will that "*someday*" come? When will we learn to forgive? To accept others as they are? When will we learn to love who and what God loves? Oh when, when, will that "*someday*" come?

Sisters and brothers, it begins with you and me. For God is trusting us as co-creators of that Kingdom "come on earth as it is in heaven." That "*someday*" will come when we and all humankind live the principle of love; when we act and show the world what a follower of Jesus is. To turn the other cheek, to share what we have, to forgive, to hold back judgment, to love a sister, a brother, the stranger, neighbor, even our enemy (the person who has wronged us) is really *not an option*. Jesus says in John's Gospel, Chapter 13 verse 35-"And they will know you are my disciples by your"-not by your rules, theology, righteousness, power, rhetoric, piety, or clubs, but by your (what?) "LOVE".

Love makes it harder to hate. Harder to curse another. Harder to hold on to possessions. Love makes it harder to hold on to grudges. Harder to judge and condemn. As followers of Jesus we are to go that extra mile and dare to love even

when the world says and acts differently. To love as Jesus calls us to love, we must be willing to go beyond ourselves and our comfort zones so that we can make a difference.

Jesus himself showed us the way of love. He modeled love for us as he went about his ministry and as he faced suffering and ultimately death upon the cross in order to show us how much he and God loves us!

The truth of the matter is that we all fall short in what Jesus asks of us especially this thing called love. But with God's help we can transform ourselves and the world with love. God is counting on us. And there is no better day than today.

Amen.