

**The Lessons Appointed for
Use on the
Seventh Sunday after the
Epiphany**



Year C
RCL

1 Corinthians 15:35-38,42-50
Luke 6:27-38
Psalm 37:1-12, 41-42

The Collect

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, without which whoever lives is accounted dead before you. Grant this for the sake of your only Son Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,

one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Psalm 37:1-12, 41-42

Noli aemulari

- 1 DO not fret yourself because of evildoers; *
do not be jealous of those who do wrong.
- 2 For they shall soon wither like the grass, *
and like the green grass fade away.
- 3 Put your trust in the LORD and do good; *
dwell in the land and feed on its riches.
- 4 Take delight in the LORD, *
and he shall give you your heart's desire.
- 5 Commit your way to the LORD and put your trust
in him, *
and he will bring it to pass.
- 6 He will make your righteousness as clear as the
light *
and your just dealing as the noonday.
- 7 Be still before the LORD *
and wait patiently for him.
- 8 Do not fret yourself over the one who prospers, *
the one who succeeds in evil schemes.
- 9 Refrain from anger, leave rage alone; *

do not fret yourself; it leads only to evil.

10 For evildoers shall be cut off, *

but those who wait upon the LORD shall possess
the land.

11 In a little while the wicked shall be no more; *

you shall search out their place, but they will not
be there.

12 But the lowly shall possess the land; *

they will delight in abundance of peace.

41 But the deliverance of the righteous comes from
the LORD; *

he is their stronghold in time of trouble.

42 The LORD will help them and rescue them; *

he will rescue them from the wicked and deliver
them,

because they seek refuge in him.

1 Corinthians 15:35-38,42-50

someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?” Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body.

So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, “The first man, Adam, became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiri-

tual that is first, but the physical, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven.

What I am saying, brothers and sisters, is this: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

Luke 6:27-38

Jesus said, “I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you.

“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, do good, and lend,

expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

“Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.”

SERMON

Last week, I quoted Rick Lawrence¹. He said:

“The story of God, contained in these pages, revolves around a Person, not a set of principles. The closer we get to Jesus, the more we discover our true identity and purpose in life.”

That’s a deep and wise thing he said, but it requires some attention from us if we are to get the best of it. Jesus certainly did lay down principles in his travels, and we have some in our passage for today:

Jesus said, “I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you.”

¹ General Editor, The Jesus Centered Bible

That's a familiar and wise set of principles, so, why does Rick Lawrence say that the story of God revolves around a person, and not a set of principles? Don't we look to the Bible for instruction on how we are to behave in God's Creation?

Well, yes, and no. The Bible certainly lays out proper ways of interacting with our brothers and sisters in a positive way, but I would suggest that there is something deeper being expressed as well, something which can only be understood by careful and intentional attention to the life of Jesus. Just as Rick Lawrence said, the closer we get to Jesus, the more we discover our true identity and purpose in life.

Does that mean that we can't discover our true identity and purpose in life by following lists of approved behavior? That's exactly what he means. The Old Testament is filled with examples of people following princi-

ples until they explode in their faces. The one that always jumps to my mind is from Psalms:

O daughter Babylon, you devastator!
Happy shall they be who pay you back
what you have done to us!
Happy shall they be who take your
little ones
and dash them against the rock!²

Babylon treated the Israelites terribly, so who could blame them for wanting revenge? When we feel victimized we love finding hateful things in the Bible that grant us permission to act on those feelings by doing things we can be certain Jesus would not approve of if we thought about it. We even have a contemporary example in a West Virginia lawmaker and Baptist pastor who recently got in the news for saying that he would

² Psalm 137

drown his children if they confessed to him that they were gay³. Following principles is important until it isn't. Maya Angelou gave us these wise words:

“Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better.”

How do we discover our true identity and purpose in life? The image which appears in my mind is that of a mother and her first new-born baby. Kathy is my teacher in these matters. While we were expecting, she studied up on the principles of caring for a new-born, drawing most heavily on the passed-down wisdom she received from her mother and her wonderful grandmother, Mamaw. By the time Kat joined us, Kathy had a wealth of principles for successful motherhood at her fingertips. These principles had been distilled from the experiences of generations of mothers and further honed on the experiences of Carolyn and Mamaw in

³ <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2019/feb/13/eric-porterfield-embattled-gop-lawmaker-clarifies/>

raising their own families. This wisdom was invaluable, a pearl of great price, and Kathy honored these principles – until they didn't work in some situation. Then, she followed the words of Maya Angelou,

**“Do the best you can until you know better.
Then when you know better, do better.”**

As she learned more about our child, she could better address the needs of the moment. The important thing to understand is that whether she applied the wisdom of her fore-mothers or did something different, the motivation, the engine behind everything she did, was love of that child and no one had to teach her that. To love and care for another is Kathy's true identity and purpose in life. I wish you all could have seen her face when Kat was first laid upon her breast. I believe that had you done so, you would understand the difference between blind adherence to a list of principles and love. I also

know that each of you have shared that experience with Kathy and me in your own families, so you know just what I'm talking about.

The guiding force behind Kathy's choices of how to raise Kat was, and remains, love. Every choice she made between the advice passed down to her and her own estimate of what was needed was guided by love. Without that guidance, we are very likely to do harmful things unawares.

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.⁴

Love is so important that Jesus' Sermon on the plain begins with love.

⁴ 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.

Without love, you are nothing. That's hard to accept.

We had some comments on the church Facebook this week from a man who seems to have founded his sense of righteousness on opposition to same-sex marriage. Such a thing, he said, was worthy of death. That's hard to square with the command to love, but that didn't seem to bother him. He'd made his choice and he had chosen something other than love.

Again, one of my old friends, commenting on the disbarment of Alan Laughrey, the Supreme Court Justice in West Virginia who has been convicted of stealing state money, expressed his fear that after Justice Laughrey gets out of prison, one of his friends will hire him to work in a law office and he'll make a lot of money.

What? Do we wish him reduced to picking up tin cans on the streets? He will never get that stink off him. He cannot practice law. He cannot run for public office. If one of his friends offers him a job so that he may have a roof over his head after he is released, is this not exactly what Jesus is counseling? What would my friend prefer?

Nothing is more challenging than the command to love – to lead your life and make your choices not on the basis of principles, adherence to which you may boast of, but under the urging of love of others. Jesus' life's foundation was love. The closer we get to Jesus, the more we discover our true identity and purpose in life. As Jean reminds us, we're practicing to be good Christians. We won't get it right the first time or the fifth time. Until we do get it right,

“Do the best you can until you know better.

Then when you know better, do better.”

AMEN

BENEDICTION

Our life's story may begin with prejudice, discrimination, and animosity, but the Spirit moves God's people toward openness, welcome, inclusion, acceptance & affirmation, or, as my friend, Rev. Lauri Clark Strait would have it, "Jesus didn't call it 'social justice.' He simply called it Love. If we would only Love our neighbors beyond comfort, borders, race, religion and the other differences that we've allowed to be barriers, 'social justice' would be a given. Love makes justice happen."

Heed the urging of the Spirit toward your true identity and purpose in life, church.

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you

peace.

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

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