

Life of Love

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Date: 09 November 2008

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[0 : 00] Father, you are indeed kind to the selfish, kind to the ungrateful, kind to the evil.

You have been kind to us in saving us through Jesus Christ, your Son. And now these gifts that we give you are merely tokens. Grant that they may signify that all our lives are yours in their entirety.

And grant us grace now to listen to your word. Grant us soft hearts that we may receive it. And grant us willing hearts that we may repent and believe and walk in newness of life.

We ask this for your glory. Amen. Amen. It will be helpful for you if you have Luke 6 on page 61 in front of you.

As we are continuing our series on the marvelous Gospel of Luke. This is a passage which is extraordinary.

[1 : 06] It is a passage about change. And isn't it appropriate that we have witnessed an election in the United States that was all about change.

This was the theme for both candidates. It was something that all those in leadership recognized was a great need for the country. And when Obama was announced as winner and the next president of the United States, there was for Americans and probably for many people in the world a thought that came to them first.

And that is that things will change. That is the hope. When we look at this passage today, that ought to be the uppermost thing in our minds as well.

It is about change. A change that Jesus himself can bring and only he can bring. Because it is a change that comes from having a life that's oriented around Jesus Christ.

The Lord and Savior. The one who brings release. Last week we heard the key passage from chapter 5 verse 32. Marvelous word of restoration.

[2 : 24] Those who are well, Jesus said, have no need of a physician but those who are sick. I have not come, he said, to call the righteous or the self-righteous. I have come to call sinners to repentance.

Repentance. Repentance. Repentance. Repentance. Repentance. Repentance is the word for change. Jesus is calling sinners, which means every person in this world, to reorder, to reorient their lives around him.

And what happens as a result by his power is a change that no politician, that no organization, that no power here on earth can affect.

It is a profound, powerful, life-changing, world-changing occurrence. And that change is real and tangible. And that is what this passage tells us about.

It is a change that takes place in the context of a world that is actually hostile to that change. It does not want it, nor does it know what to do with it.

[3 : 26] When you look at this passage, it is overwhelming for us, in a sense, in this world, because we see how big the vision is, the vision of change that Jesus calls us to.

And so I think it is important, as we look at this passage, that we will struggle with this vision. And the person preaching this morning is the first one who struggles with this vision.

It is not easy to live up to what God is calling us to in these 29 verses. It is also a bit frightening because it means acting. It means speaking in ways that do not come easily.

We are actually called here to go out on a limb and trust God with the things in our lives that are most important to us. And so we look at this passage, as we look at it and are perhaps daunted by it, it is important for us to have a vision of who Jesus is, which has been really clearly laid out to us in the previous chapters by Luke.

Remember the first sermon of Jesus. Remember he said that the Holy Spirit has come upon me and I've been anointed. I've been anointed to proclaim release to the captives.

[4 : 44] And he's saying that Jesus brings release that brings a new life of change and repentance. He frees people to live a healed life.

The Holy Spirit is on him and so his word has the power of the Holy Spirit. The power of the Holy Spirit to change our hearts and our lives. And so our passage is all about the doctoring work of Jesus and what that looks like in a real life, in real time.

And it shows us how much we need to be in contact with him regularly for that healing, for his healing to take place in our lives. So what does the healed life look like?

Well, Jesus tells us in this sermon, which is actually at the bottom of a mountain or high hill. We read earlier in Luke that, just earlier in this chapter, that Jesus has prayed on the mountain before he chose 12 disciples who would be leaders of the new people of God.

A huge crowd gathers.

[6 : 00] And in that crowd, there are disciples and the larger crowd. All of them can hear what Jesus is speaking about here. And in verse 19, we see that people are experiencing great power in Jesus' ministry.

By the way, I think this is a way of seeing preaching in the church. It's for those who are disciples already. And it is also for those who are curious. Curious about this one who brings change.

So it's something that is meant to actually change the world. And I want to, this is a big passage, and I want to look at just three aspects of change.

Three big changes that Jesus brings about in our lives by his word. The first thing that Jesus does is he changes our status. I want you to look at verses 20 through 26, because Jesus talks about four blessings, and they are followed by four woes.

And they all talk about a tremendous reversal of fortunes that Jesus brings to us when we come to him for repentance. And isn't it interesting that those four blessings have to do with the things that the world tries to avoid most?

[7 : 17] Being poor, being hungry, being grief-stricken, and being rejected or reviled. This is about being on the margin of society.

This is about having your security stripped away from you. Not having any kind of safety net. Only God can bring good news to this status.

And Jesus proclaims this. He says, Blessed are you if you orient your life around me, because suddenly, he's saying here, you are in the place of God's blessing. The world doesn't see it.

But God said, this is what, Jesus says, this is what happens. And you know that poor does not mean those just with little money, although that is a part of what that means. It also means to have been excluded from society, from everything that is a support and that is good.

Jesus, the wealthy Levi, was one of these people. Wealthy Zacchaeus was one of the poor. And Jesus says to them and to us, If you turn to me, you have real security.

[8 : 23] The creator of the universe is now your father. The kingdom of God is yours, Jesus says. And everything that is good, that comes from him, belongs to you.

Not only does he say that, he says, The hunger, even though you may continue in your hunger, can know that that hunger is temporary. That they will know the release that Jesus gives.

They can know that they will be satisfied, he says, in him. And you know, the kingdom of God is often talked about as a heavenly banquet, where we are completely satisfied with Jesus Christ himself.

And then he goes on to talk about those who weep. It's talking about those who are sensitive to the world's evils for a variety of reasons, that there is grief.

And it might be because of loss or rejection or ridicule or knowing evil in this world. Jesus says, Blessed are those who weep now, because that's temporary.

[9 : 26] You will laugh. And the word for laughter did not have a good connotation at that time, but Jesus restores it. And he says that the laughter has to do with the joy of being restored.

That no matter how deep your pain, that grief brings, the restoration and the joy that God brings is deeper. And it replaces our loss.

There is healing. It is the very essence of the kingdom of God coming into people. And this is the thing that we look forward to in the resurrection of the dead. The new heaven and the new earth where all things evil, all death and crying and grief will be taken away because the new will have come.

That's the good news in turning to Jesus. You have turned to the one who gives deeper joy than the deepest pain that we can experience. Jesus comes into our weeping even now.

And finally, he says, Blessed are you when you are completely rejected because of Jesus. He says, Rejoice because you have great reward in heaven. Now, he can only say that because King Jesus is so great that it is an honor to suffer for him and with him.

[10 : 44] And there is a reward promised. We don't exactly know what that is. But I think it is very likely that the greatest reward we can hear is Jesus saying, Well done, good and faithful servant, to you and to me.

This is reward. To know that the King is one that you were able to live for and that he received your worship and your life with blessing.

Now, these blessings are driven home by woes. Look at verses 24 through 26. These are things that are all exalted in our world.

So it's nonsensical from a world's point of view. It says, Woe are you if you experience wealth, being well fed, being able to laugh at life.

In other words, to be glad for your lot in life. And if you have people speak well of you all the time. Now, if we are honest, these are the kinds of things we want for our children.

[11 : 45] You know, we want people to be able to like us. We want to be well taken care of and not to experience any kind of deprivation. Yet these things that Jesus describes also speak of self-sufficiency.

They are the difficult idols that often prevent us from repentance and receiving the good news of God for the poor. You know, if things are great in my life, if I am sufficient in what I have here in this world and in myself, why would I want to change?

There is no good news if you already have idols that satisfy. But Jesus speaks here about the temporary security in the world, the nature of those idols.

He says, If wealth is the idol, you have already received your consolation. There is no more after this life. If it is being well fed is the idol, you will be hungry.

That time of satisfaction will end. If it is being so secure in this world that you are able to laugh at the world and revel in your good fortune, that security is temporary and is taken away.

[12 : 55] They will mourn. And finally, if your idol is hearing that everyone speaks well of you, you are actually in the company of the false prophets. In other words, you are beholden to the world that wants you and shapes you into its ways that you will be acceptable to it.

All of that comes to an end because the kingdom of God will come in all its power. We will see Jesus as our savior and our judge. And so God brings to us a deep reversal as we center our lives on Jesus.

The great things of the kingdom are not status and wealth and self-sufficiency. It is the things of the kingdom of God. It is, the great things are God's provision.

His healing of our sin and pain. His change in our lives. And that's why Jesus says it's a wonderful thing to risk rejection for the sake of living for him. Because this is, this is our new status.

This is what we are about as Christians. It is about depending upon him for our healing. Now secondly, not only does your status change in the healed life, but your love changes.

[14 : 07] And I gotta say that in this next section, verses 27 through 38, there is a radical form of love that is taught to us. And it is challenging, deeply challenging to me as I read through it this week and to you as well, I'm sure.

It should bring humility to us and a renewed dependence on God to help us to live for him. I think it's good for us to get the full weight of his preaching by looking at verses 27 through 30.

He says, but I say to you that here, love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who abuse you.

To him who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also. From him who takes away your coat, do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you and of him who takes away your goods, do not ask them again.

Now Jesus is saying there is something very powerful here about the theme. He is saying the healed life involves loving people who naturally do not deserve it.

[15 : 19] It is love of extreme generosity. It involves forgiving and extending grace where you can only hope to receive a curse.

Jesus' disciples and Christians in every generation will know what it means to be cursed, to be rejected, to experience persecution and mistreatment.

All of them will have had a chance to practice this very real teaching on love. And it doesn't mean that you allow injustice and abuse in your life.

All right justice is God's justice. The Bible is very clear that civil law is set up by God to punish wrongdoers. Luke outlines a number of times where Christians call on the authorities, the secular authorities, for protection.

And Christians always ought to pursue what is right and what is just. But in every case, Jesus says we are to do it in love and without revenge.

[16 : 28] In fact, this love for enemies actually takes the initiative. It looks for ways to do good to the haters, to bless those who curse, to pray for the abusers.

That's a challenge for us. It's a challenge for me too. It is radical love. This is an issue for us at St. John's because Jesus here is calling us to bless those who would take our building away from us.

And that is why St. John's leadership has tried persistently for an amicable settlement that would bless both parties. And even as we seek protection through civil law, we are meant to guard against resentment or a desire for revenge.

We are meant to guard against glorying in the loss if we happen to be victorious. To guard against bitterness and resentment if we don't, if we are not. And instead, we are to pray for the diocese and their decision makers to look for ways to bless and to love.

It's not easy. And it goes against human nature and the values of our world. But that's what Jesus is doing in his word. He places a very high value and extremely generous love and he rewards it.

[17 : 46] Look at verses 32 through 34 because here, again, Jesus drives the teaching home. He said, look, if you love those who love you, if you do good to those who do good to you and lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you?

Even people who don't know God, even sinners, do the same. Instead, Jesus repeats in verse 35, love your neighbors, do good and lend, expect nothing in return and your reward will be great.

It is a paradox. In giving away yourself to those that cannot and will not give back, you actually will receive a reward. And that is that you will be called sons of the Most High.

In fact, it says later on in our passage that you will receive in good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over in your lap, you will receive goodness as you give away love with no hope of return.

How can that be? It's an extraordinary thing. Well, the only way that we can do this and the key for us is what we see about the nature of God.

[18 : 59] As we look a little further along after verse 35, it says, for He, the Most High, is kind to the ungrateful and the selfish.

This is what Jim was praying in the prayer of the offering. And it says, be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. You see, all of our acts of mercy and love are grounded in the nature of God.

And you and I are the ones who have received kindness from God because we are the ungrateful, we are the selfish, we have received mercy.

And God says, be merciful, even as your Father has been merciful to you. That's the key to this very difficult thing of giving love and grace to people who have hurt us.

We are the ones who have received mercy upon mercy. The treasures of the Gospels are ours. We love because God first loved us.

[20 : 00] And that's grace. And the question for us is, how does my love and my grace extend into those places where there is none? Now, I just want to give a caution.

In verse 37, this is probably the most quoted verse to me from people who are not Christians. And it's often quoted with great authority.

Judge not and you will not be judged. And it is the way of saying that you have no right to express any opinion other than a bland affirmation of everything.

But of course, in verse 42, it says that once we take the logs over our own eyes with humility, recognizing our sinfulness, we are to help our brothers and sisters with the specks in their eyes.

And more importantly, the Gospel is about Jesus calling sinners to change, to repentance. He comes to release people from sin, not encourage them to continue in it.

[21 : 00] We are to carry on Jesus' ministry of release without condemning or dismissing people. But we can't talk about good news without speaking about the change that Jesus calls us to.

And that verse is saying no one is beyond that grace. Don't hide the grace from people around us. Don't write people off. But in humility, as fellow sinners, we invite people to the place of God's blessing and grace with generous love.

Now, I want to close with the last change. It's a change in status. I want to briefly talk about it. This is about worship. Not only are we, does God change our status, not only does God change our love, but Jesus' healing brings us a change in worship.

I think, if you look down at 47, verse 47, that the Christian life is summed up in Jesus' words here, in a very small phrase in verse 47.

Yeah, you have to turn the page, top of page 62. He says, everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them.

[22 : 13] That is a description of a Christian, a Christian life. It is a description of worship. There's three parts of this movement of worship. Number one, come to me, Jesus says.

Turn to the living Jesus. You are turning to a person who is God. Secondly, hear my word, he says. Hear this God speaking to you a living word, a word of power.

And thirdly, do my word. Live out that life, which is what the act of worship is. There's a huge change for those who are listening to this because Jesus is saying worship is not about rules that make you acceptable to God.

It's not a worship of oneself either in which we are self-righteous and strive to be self-sufficient before God. The new worship is oriented around Jesus himself and his words.

It's about living in a united relationship with him. It is about God reaching into our hearts by calling us and speaking to us and actually replacing the treasure that is in our hearts, replacing the evil treasure and idolatry with the very good treasure in our hearts.

[23 : 30] And worship for us now is about living out that treasure. It is about bearing good fruit. It is about living things out so that the whole world might be filled with the knowledge and love of God.

God. This is the goal that we have as Christians and in our worship as well. It is to bear fruit out of the grace that we have received by Jesus Christ.

And Jesus says, build your lives on this. You know, the two images that he has are of two men building on the same soil. That's why the story is a bit different from Matthew. Same rock.

But one has a foundation, one does not. And the foundation goes deep into the rock. That digging deep into the foundation is building your life by obeying this living word of God.

And what happens as a result is when we see Jesus at judgment, our lives, the things we have built in our lives, will stand and not be taken away and called worthless by God.

[24 : 39] But it will stand and it will be part of the kingdom of God. Our worship, our living out what God has done in these extravagant loves and this extravagant way of obeying God and his word will bring about a lasting memorial in the kingdom of God.

And so this is what we ask the Holy Spirit to help us with. That God's word would empower us to live for him and build our lives on him. That we, on that last day, will be able to hear God say to us, well done, good and faithful servant.

Come and inherit the kingdom that was promised to you. You have received the change that God has offered to you. Amen. Amen. Let us pray.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. I will leave short moments of silence between prayers when you may offer your own petitions to the Lord.

Heavenly Father, we thank you that we can meet together as a family here in this place. We thank you for the many comforts and privileges that we know in our daily lives.

[26 : 14] We thank you, Father, that you created each one of us, that you love us dearly and desire to walk with us through whatever ups and downs we encounter in our lives.

Father, this morning, we pray for humble hearts that we may acknowledge our own sinfulness and yearn to depend on you more fully.

By your Holy Spirit, so fill us with your generous love that others may know you and your Son Jesus through us. Give us the will to reach out and care for others, even those who reject us, to speak words of comfort, your words, and not to bend into our culture.

Heavenly Father, as we approach Remembrance Day, we give thanks for those men and women who served in the armed forces in years past, and we pray for Canadians presently serving in Afghanistan that they and their families might know your blessing and your protection.

Father, we thank you for our country, Canada, and the privileges of living in a democracy.

[28 : 16] We pray for our upcoming civic elections that those elected to office may reflect your wisdom, your charity, and your justice.

Father, we bring to you the families of our church.

Give strength and wisdom to parents as they seek to teach and guide their children, enable children to receive love and guidance from their parents and other caring adults.

We pray for the ministries to both children and youth within St. John's that you might continue to uplift and support this work in our parish. Heavenly Father, we pray for our church of St. John's and thank you for our leadership.

praying for their ongoing protection and strength during these uncertain times. We remember as well other churches across Canada who have committed themselves to the Anglican Network or who are contemplating doing this.

[30 : 06] We pray for your Holy Spirit to guide and oversee all the details. We give thanks for the first synod of our Anglican Network in Burlington this coming week.

We pray for wisdom for Bishops Don Harvey and Malcolm Harding as they offer leadership to this gathering. Father, hover over this meeting and bless them all in their deliberations.

Father, we remember those who are in special need of your prayers this day.

We pray for those in our city who are homeless, unemployed, and who struggle alone without any knowledge of your saving grace.

Be their comfort and protection this day. We lift to you those in our parish who are ill or who are convalescing or who are in any kind of distress.

[31 : 24] We name now Manny, Rowena, Ben and Nancy, Fiona, Paul, Wynne, and Mayran.

And lastly, Father, we bring to you that which is on our hearts this morning and lay it at your feet. we offer all these prayers in the precious name of him who delights to grant our requests according to his merciful loving kindness and his eternal love.

Amen.