

SERMON TITLE: "Love, Christian Style"  
SERMON TEXT: Luke 6:27-38  
PREACHER: Rev. Kim James  
OCCASION: February 14, 2021, at First UMC

### **INTRODUCTION**

On this Valentine's weekend, I'm sure most of us have been thinking a lot about love. Hopefully, most of us have had or will have opportunities to share our love with our dearest ones. Even though we can express our affection any day of the year, it's good that we have a holiday to remind us to do or say that little something extra that makes our love so much stronger.

Thank goodness for Hallmark cards, right? Because, for some of us, Valentine's Day is like the young couple who went for a walk on a sunny day. After they had walked a while, they sat on a park bench and listened to the birds. Finally, Carla turned to her boyfriend and *asked, "Do you think my eyes are like stars?" "Yeah," he replied.*

*"And do you think my teeth are like pearls?" Carla continued. "Yeah," he said.*

*"And do you think my hair is like spun gold in the moonlight?" "Yeah," he repeated.*

*"Oh, Joe!" she exclaimed. "You say the most wonderful things!"<sup>1</sup>*

There's another story about a couple who were very much in love. They were celebrating their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. Instead of having a big party with lots of relatives and friends, though, this couple decided to return to the hotel where they had spent their honeymoon. Over dinner, the couple reminisced about the days when they were first married. After they went *to bed, the wife said, "Darling do you remember how you stroked my hair?" And so he stroked her hair. She reminded him of the way they had [held each other], and so they did. Then, with a sigh, she whispered, "Won't you nibble my ear again?"*

*With that, the husband got out of bed and left the room. "Where are you going?" cried the wife. "To get my teeth," he said.<sup>2</sup>*

Years ago, when I was a kid, there was a series on television called “Love, American Style.” The premise of the show was that the French didn’t have a monopoly on romance. To prove that point, we were given, week after week, several rather silly vignettes about people who were in love, American style.

Well, today, I’d like for us to think about what it means to love, Christian style. While Christian love can be romantic and silly, it certainly isn’t always. As we see in our gospel lesson from Luke 6, love, Christian style can face some pretty tough circumstances.

### **1—LOVE THOSE WHO LOVE US**

According to Jesus, Christian-style love begins first with loving those who love us. In verse 32, Jesus says that even sinners are capable of this reciprocal love, in which we take turns scratching each other’s back. What Jesus means to say is that this kind of love is just common sense. It doesn’t take a rocket scientist or a Mother Theresa to figure out that we are all better off if we at least love those who love us.

Let’s think for a minute about the people who do love us. Probably most of us have spouses, children, parents, siblings, and/or friends who are devoted to us. Some of us even have co-workers and neighbors who hold us in their hearts. I think most of us would agree that we also have kind and wonderful people in our First United Methodist congregation who love us. The care and compassion that we share with one another is beautiful, isn’t it?!

Theoretically, all these persons closest to us are the ones who should be the easiest for us to love. And, for the most part, they are and we do. We spend time with them. We look out for their needs. We run errands and do chores for them. We play and pray together and try to please those who love us. But, if we’re honest, we also know that sometimes we take out our frustrations on those who are closest. We sometimes allow ourselves to get cranky, snippy, and stubborn. When we don’t feel well or when we’re stressed by other circumstances, we fail to express gratitude and appreciation. We take for granted those

who are nearest and dearest—failing to spend quality time with them, failing to respond to them in love, failing to love them with mutual help and delight.

*A Jewish folktale tells of two brothers who farmed together. They shared equally in all of the work and split the profits exactly. Each had his own granary. One of the brothers was married and had a large family; the other brother was single.*

*One day the single brother thought to himself, “[It’s] not fair that we divide the grain evenly. My brother has many mouths to feed, while I have but one. I know what I’ll do. [I’ll] take a sack of grain from my granary each evening and put it in my brother’s granary.” So, each night when it was dark, he carefully carried a sack of grain, placing it in his brother’s barn.*

*[Meanwhile] the married brother thought to himself, “[It’s] not fair that we divide the grain evenly. I have many children to care for me in my old age, and my brother has none. I know what I’ll do. [I’ll] take a sack of grain from my granary each evening and put it in my brother’s granary.” And he did.*

*Each morning the two brothers were amazed to discover that though they had removed a sack of grain the night before, they had just as many. One night the two brothers met each other halfway between their barns, each carrying a sack of grain. Then they understood the mystery. And they embraced, and loved each other deeply.<sup>3</sup>*

Love, Christian style, presupposes that we love those who love us.

## **2—LOVE YOUR ENEMIES**

But love, Christian style, doesn’t stop with Reciprocal Love 101—which Jesus says even sinners can do. In Luke 6, Jesus teaches that love, Christian style, requires that we also love our enemies. As Christians, we are taught to do good to those who hate us, bless those who curse us, and pray for those who abuse us. Jesus says we should turn the other cheek to those who would strike us and offer a second garment to those who would take the clothes off our backs. We are supposed to give and forgive without condemnation.

Wow! That's a hard teaching! How can we love those who are so cruel? Are we to pretend that what they do doesn't hurt us? Are we just to stand there like wimps and take it? Are we to contribute to the mockery of justice and decency? How is it possible that we could love those who would take advantage of us so terribly? What did Jesus mean?

Well, we do know that Jesus meant to say something pretty radical. So we can't water down his teachings. But we should be careful to interpret them in the context of Jesus' whole life. For example, Jesus' sayings about turning the other cheek and praying for those who abuse us should never be used to condone injustice or domestic violence. Neither children nor adults should think Jesus would want them to stay in an environment of emotional, verbal, or physical abuse. Up until the night before his crucifixion, Jesus frequently fled from those who wanted to harm him. If Jesus blessed them, prayed for them, and forgave them, he did it from a safe distance. And we should too.

When fleeing for safety is not an option, the next best choice is turning the other cheek. This is the Christian alternative to escalating the violence. Instead of retaliating an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth until we are all blind and toothless, we turn the other cheek in hopes of bringing the conflict to an end. Jesus was advocating the way of love, so that we can win over our opponent with kindness and reasonable justice.

Recently I've been watching a TV drama about courts and legal cases. One of the main characters is a lawyer who works for the District Attorney's office, so he's on the side of the prosecution. But he's recently become interested in restorative justice, which is a way to get the offender and the victim talking with each other to work out a fair resolution that makes sense to both parties. This kind of justice isn't easy and doesn't always work. But when it does, everyone feels better and healing comes. Maybe loving our enemies is like that. Love, Christian style, doesn't demand vengeance that is greater than the offense. Love, Christian style, recognizes that our enemies are people like us who have their own stories and

troubles that brought them to their encounter with us. And maybe, if we both hold them accountable and give them a chance to make things right, both of us will be better off afterward.

Love, Christian style, isn't a simple matter, and it doesn't mean that we deny the pain inflicted upon us by others. But, if we continue to interact with them, we must be prepared to use good instead of hate, blessings instead of curses, truth instead of exaggeration, and humility instead of violence. Love, Christian style, means that we love even our enemies.

### **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, I want to tell you one of Aesop's fables. Do you remember the story about the sun and the wind arguing *over which was the stronger? The wind said, "Do you see that old man down there? I can make him take his coat off quicker than you can."* The sun agreed to go behind a cloud while the wind blew up a storm. However, the harder the wind blew, the firmer the old man wrapped his coat around him. Eventually the wind gave up, and sun came out from behind the cloud and smiled kindly upon the old man.

*Before long, the old man mopped his brow, pulled off his coat, and strolled on his way. The sun knew the secret; warmth, friendliness, and a gentle touch are always stronger than force and fury.*<sup>4</sup>

Christian love begins with loving those who love us. But then it becomes much more difficult. When we learn to treat even our enemies the way we would like to be treated, that's love, Christian style.

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<sup>1</sup> *Italics indicate quote from Joe Taylor, ed., Sourcebook of Wit and Wisdom* (Communication Resources: Canton, OH: 1996), p. 119.

<sup>2</sup> Eric W. Johnson, ed., *A Treasury of Humor* (Ivy Books: New York, 1989), p. 222.

<sup>3</sup> William R. White, *Stories for Telling* (Augsburg Press: Minneapolis, 1986), pp. 30f.

<sup>4</sup> Denis Waitley, *Seeds of Greatness*, in *Sourcebook of Wit and Wisdom*, p. 125.