



# LIVING WORD EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Evangelical • Reformed • Catholic

## Hear and Do

### Luke 6:39-49

Fr. William Klock

May 18, 2014 – Easter 4

This morning we'll be looking at Luke 6:38-49. These are the closing thoughts that Jesus gives us in his sermon about the kingdom. Earlier in the chapter we saw that, like a new Moses, he went up to the mountain to pray—to meet with God—and when he came down, he gathered his disciples and chose twelve of them to be apostles, to be envoys with authority to take the message of his Messiahship and his kingdom to the world. Again, Luke portrays him as a new Moses establishing his new Israel and as a new Moses, Jesus, having come down from the mountain, teaches his people a new law. The old law was external and written on tablets of stone; the new law is internal and written on hearts made new by the Holy Spirit. The new law is centred in the person of Jesus the Messiah who has come to preach good news to the poor, sight to the blind, and release to the captives. And that's the difference between the old and the new. Israel failed in keeping the old law because it wasn't in her heart—it was on stone tablets—and the hearts of Israel were still captive to sin. Jesus has now taken Israel's identity and mission on himself. He's become and fulfilled the law himself, and now as he gives himself to his people, they give themselves to him and the new law is made manifest in radical ways that no one would have dreamed of before. The good news, the healing, and the release that Jesus has brought is revealed as his people love their enemies, do good to those who hate them, bless those who curse them, and pray for those who abuse them.

If you've been paying attention it's hard to miss just how radical all of this

is. Jesus isn't just reiterating the old command to love your neighbour; he's telling us to love our *enemies*—the people who hate, curse, and abuse us. He not just telling us to be nice; he's telling us to set our own rights aside for the sake of our witness to the kingdom. If someone strikes you, don't fight back. If someone steals from you, send them on their way with your stuff *and* your blessing. Be generous, not just with your loved ones and family, but be generous with people you don't know and even the people you don't like. And there's a strong anti-establishment undercurrent too: Don't look for your security or your reward in Caesar's system of patronage and obligation. Jesus is Lord; Caesar is a pretender. Caesar offers security for today, but Jesus offers security for eternity. This undermines our values and our priorities and our character at every level.

Some people were truly ready to follow; but a lot—maybe even most—of the people were ready to go home thinking that Jesus was a great man, a great teacher, had some wonderful ideas—and they were even ready to call him their Lord. But the radical nature of his call hadn't really sunk in. They were ready to go home and be nicer than they had been before, but they didn't truly understand or weren't truly ready to really, truly, actually live all this out—to *really* love their enemies. For the most part their plan was to keep doing things the way they had always done them, but now with a thin Jesus veneer on the surface. No *real* commitment.

This continues to be a problem. Think of all the times you've been fired up by a speaker or preacher or an activist or politician. You go home thinking about what they've said you need to do, but you put it off until tomorrow. By tomorrow morning half your motivation has dissipated and by lunchtime you've already forgotten half of what he said anyway. Think of the times you hear something that motivates you or that concerns you

and you gets fired up, but that fire never generates more than talk. This has become so pervasive on the Internet that we've coined a term for it: "slacktivism"—it's the "activism" of "slackers". You read about something, see a story on TV, or hear a speaker talk about some horrible problem—abortion, political corruption, unjust war, bad theology, climate change, kidnapped kids in Africa—and you post a meme about it on Facebook or a hashtag on Twitter and pat yourself on the back for doing good, but you do nothing more. When Jesus taught these radical things, there were plenty of people ready to become Jesus "slacktivists"—ready to talk, but not ready to do. Imagine the families going home that day and talking over dinner about the amazing things Jesus had said, maybe even telling their friends, but never actually living out the things he said. That's what Jesus addresses at the end of his sermon here and we need to listen, because there are a lot of people who are big Jesus fans, lots of people who bear the name "Christian", lots of people who "hear", but who don't really follow through.

Jesus addresses these people with a series of four parables. They're actually funny illustrations. We're not used to thinking of Jesus as being funny or telling jokes, but that's what he does here. He gives the people some funny images that they'll be sure to remember and he does this because the point he makes with them is deathly serious: *If you're going to call me "Lord", you've got to do more than hear me; you've got to do what I say—you've got to be obedient.*

Look at verses 39 and 40:

**He also told them a parable: "Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit? A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher."**

Jesus begins with this humorous picture of a blind man leading a blind

man. I picture him maybe stumbling around at the front of the crowd with his eyes closed, maybe taking one of them by the hand and the two of them bumping into a tree and then stumbling over a stone. Everyone knows that the blind can't lead the blind anywhere but into trouble. Imagine a blind seeing-eye dog leading his owner into the middle of busy traffic. Now, these people listening to Jesus weren't guides or leaders; they were followers and many of them were looking for someone to lead them. They were looking for more, just as so many people today are feeling empty or far from God and looking for something more. Many of these people had, no doubt, followed other leaders, but Jesus was different. Back in the synagogue in Nazareth Jesus had read Isaiah's words about the one who would come to give sight to the blind and then he had publicly declared that he was that one. His mission is to the blind of this world—not the physically blind, but the spiritually blind. He's the one who can lead rightly and authoritatively. But there were lots of voices competing with his. The people listening to him could just as easily go listen to the Pharisees or the leaders of other groups if they wanted something more—if they wanted to feel like they were following God more closely or if they wanted to be more holy. And that's who Jesus has in mind when he warns: "A teacher will train you to be just like himself, but a teacher can't offer anything more than what he's already got."

Remember that in that day, if you wanted to learn how to be holy, the Pharisees were the teachers you went to. They believed that the Lord would only come back to rescue his people when they'd learned to be truly holy, and so they made a science out of holiness and they were truly passionate about it. But what's clear is that as passionate as the Pharisees were for holiness, Jesus is teaching a new and more profound kind of

holiness. The Pharisees had a hundred and one rules for how to love your *neighbour* and now Jesus is talking about loving your *enemy*. The Pharisees don't understand and can't teach this kind of holiness.

He goes on in verses 41 and 42:

**“Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,’ when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother’s eye.”**

Jesus gives us another humorous image of a man blinded by a log in his eye trying to fish a tiny speck of dust from his friend's eye. But as much as the image is funny, Jesus' point is serious. Jesus is pointing to the Pharisees and not just them, but to Israel herself. The Pharisees were passionate about holiness. We've seen they were so passionate about it that they spent their time spying on Jesus, looking for him to break some minor point of the law, and confronting him when his disciples plucked grain on or when he healed sick people on the Sabbath. You might love your neighbour in a hundred different ways, but you could count on a Pharisee pointing out the one-hundred-and-first way that you forgot, no matter how small or insignificant it was. They and the scribes would get together to discuss the finer points of the law and all the subtle ways of keeping it and breaking it. They were good at finding specks from the eyes of others. The problem was that they were walking around with big logs in their own eyes. And most of the people in Israel, even the ones who weren't Pharisees, were doing the same to some extent. They had become passionate about the law—about

*t Torah*—but they were keeping it to themselves. God gave Israel the law so that she would become a shining beacon attracting the gentiles to her light, but instead Israel had turned the law into something to condemn the gentiles and to keep them on the outside.

We're still sometimes like the Pharisees today. I think back several years to an Internet discussion I was in about the nature of God's love. There were disagreements over some minor theological points that blew up into a knock-down, drag-out war of words. Like the Pharisees, we had the finer points down, but we'd missed the big picture. In fact, we'd missed the whole point. Sometimes Christians get so bogged down in lists of dos and don'ts—and usually the dos really are good things and the don'ts really are bad things—but in the process we forget the big picture of grace. I've met clergy who are so obsessed with the finer points of liturgy and ritual and of vestments and the proper arrangement of things on the Communion Table that they forget the proclamation of Jesus' good news. Preacher can get so bogged down in the finer points of Scripture that they forget to tell their people what to *do* with that Scripture. All too often we get bogged down in programs, buildings, committees, budgets and the like (all good things) and lose our focus on Jesus himself, on his kingdom and our mission.

Jesus reminds us that we need to keep our focus on him. Specifically here he warns us against following leaders who have lost their focus. Don't follow the guy with the log in his eye. Yes, you may have a speck in your own eye and, yes, it needs to be removed, but the guy with the log in his eye isn't the one to do it. And if you are the leader with the log in your eye: Yes, the speck in the other guy's eye needs to come out, but make your priority the log in your own. When you get the gospel right, when your

focus is first and foremost on Jesus and on the grace he offers, *then* you can deal with the specks—with the finer points of holiness and ministry and mission—and be able to deal with them with a gospel focus.

The problem is that far too often we put the cart before the horse. We put good behaviour before a change of heart. That was what led the Pharisees into their legalism and it's what leads us into legalism too. Look at verses 43-45:

**“For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.”**

There were plenty of farmers and harvesters in the crowd. They knew that barren trees don't produce fruit. They knew that brambles don't grow grapes and thornbushes don't grow figs. If you want grapes you'll only get them from a grapevine. Figs only come from fig trees. The Old Testament often speaks of fruit as a metaphor for our conduct, our works, and our character. Psalm 1 talks about the person who delights in the law of the Lord as being like a tree planted by a stream of living water that yields good fruit in due season. Through Isaiah, God exhorts the righteous not to be discouraged; one day they will eat the *fruit of their deeds* (3:10). Sirach writes, “The fruit discloses the cultivation of a tree; so the expression of a thought discloses the cultivation of a person's mind” (27:6). Some plants can put on a good show. There are some brambles in the park behind my house that are very difficult to distinguish from blackberries, but when August and September roll

around you can tell them apart very easily, because only the real blackberry vines produce fruit. At the end of the day—or at the end of the season—the fruit reveals the true nature of the bush or the vine or the tree. And just so for human beings. As Jesus says, a good heart produces good fruit and an evil heart, evil fruit. *Our works—our obedience to God, or lack thereof—are the produce of our hearts.* And so it follows that if you want to see truly good works and not only good works, but good works that last, you've got to have a changed and renewed heart. This is what the Pharisees were missing. Calling for holiness and moral reform won't produce true and lasting goodness unless hearts are transformed first. Christians today are prone to the same problem. We often look down our noses and sometimes even openly rebuke the sin we see in our non-Christian neighbours and in the world around us. We launch moral crusades and call with loud voices for people to do what we know to be right or we try to use our political clout to legislate away the sins of others. But in the process we forget the Gospel itself. We forget that if we truly want people to be good, Jesus has to change them from the inside out. Shouting angrily about their sins is more likely to drive them away from us and from the reconciling grace of Jesus. We angrily point to the specks (and sometimes even the logs) in their eyes, while forgetting the logs in our own—while forgetting the Gospel that they so desperately need. Brothers and sisters, calling for moral reform without proclaiming—and living out, witnessing, and demonstrating—the gospel love and grace of Jesus is like going out and tying cluster of grapes to brambles or like tying figs to thornbushes. Holiness can only come from a heart that has first been made holy by Jesus.

Everybody understand this idea of good fruit coming from good trees and Jesus has connected this with the idea

of good deeds—this whole idea of loving our enemies—only coming from a renewed and good heart. Everybody was nodding in agreement. None of this is controversial. Jesus has set the trap; now he springs it in verse 46:

**“Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?”**

Jesus' command to love our enemies, which he gave in our passage last Sunday is probably the most difficult part of his sermon for us to digest. It's not possible. We think, “I can't love my enemy. And giving up my rights for the sake of strangers is awfully extreme.” We can't do those things and so we simply interpret them as Jesus' over the top and hyperbolic way of telling us that we need to be nicer people. And here Jesus hits us between the eyes with the reality of his kingdom. “You call me ‘Lord. You claim to be a member of my kingdom. But you're not doing the things I told you to do. When I said to love your enemy I said to love your enemy. I wasn't just telling you to be a nicer person. When I told you to sacrifice your own rights for the sake of strangers, I really did mean sacrifice.” Jesus makes it clear that we've got no business calling him Lord if we aren't ready and committed to doing what he says. And if we object that what he says is impossible, he also gives us the solution here. He tells us that the people who do obey are the people who have truly made him their lord. If the Pharisees—or their modern equivalents—are your teachers, this will always be impossible. As Jesus says, they can only get you so far. But if Jesus is your teacher, he makes this kind of radical holiness possible *as you submit to his lordship*. What does it mean to have Jesus as your Lord? It means that you've acknowledged him as the Messiah—the one sent by God to make all things new, including your heart. It means that you trust him. You acknowledge that he's the true

king, not Caesar, and you submit to his kingship and his kingdom as your source of security. It means you trust him instead of a list of dos and don'ts in order to be part of that kingdom. And through that trust—through that faith—Jesus himself gives you a heart capable of doing good to those who hate you, a heart capable of blessing those who curse you, and a heart capable of praying for those who abuse you.

In the old kingdom everyone expected that when God came back he'd recognise his people by how well they kept his law. That's why the scribe and Pharisees had turned law-keeping into such a science. Now Jesus says that, no, when the Lord returns in judgement he will recognise his people by their having trusted in the lordship of Jesus and that trust is made manifest in a changed heart that is obedient to his commands. And to highlight this he tells another funny story with a deadly serious point. It's a story of two builders. Look at verses 47-49:

**Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who hears and does not do them is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the stream broke against it, immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great."**

Imagine two men building houses on a floodplain or a dry riverbed. It may not rain often, but when it does the water collects quickly and washes away everything in its path. A house built on sand deposited by the last flood will be washed away by that fast-flowing floodwaters. But if you dig down past the sand and build a

solid foundation on the rock below, the floodwaters may crash against your foundation, but they won't wash your house away. It's an image of final judgement. And Jesus' point is that warm and happy feelings about him aren't enough. Adding a thin, good-looking veneer of Jesus to your life isn't enough. If you want to stand through God's judgement, Jesus has to be your Lord. G. B. Caird puts it this way:

"The final characteristic of the new life is obedience, not, as in Judaism, to a set of rules, but to a person. The title Lord contains in itself a whole history of New Testament thought about Jesus. On the lips of the early Christians it expressed successively respect to their Teacher, loyalty to their Messiah, homage to the risen and ascended King, worship to the divine Saviour. But at every stage there was the same need for a reminder that undisciplined emotion readily masquerades as true faith and that Lordship is the right to command obedience."<sup>1</sup>

Brothers and sisters, again, the issue isn't how warm and fuzzy we feel about Jesus. It's whether or not he's our Lord and whether or not we've trusted in his goodness and his power to redeem and submitted to his rule and kingdom. In that submission—which we make visible in our submission to Baptism and which we remember every time we come to partake of the life he gives at his Table—he give his Holy Spirit, uniting us to himself, transforming us from the inside out, and that transformation bears good fruit. It results in Paul's fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. But that fruit is just another way of scribing a transformed heart that love enemies and desires to do good, to bless, and to pray for those who do it evil. Obedience is simple.

It's not a long list of rules. It's a person. It's profoundly difficult—loving our enemies—but it's our union with Jesus and transformation by his Spirit that makes that kind of love possible. And consider the impact that something so profoundly impossible will have on the world around us if we are obedient. *This* is our ministry and our mission, but we're prone to making it more complicated. We think of ministry as going to far off countries as missionaries or going into full-time church work. We think if we aren't doing "great things for God", we're failing. But brothers and sisters, consider the amazing impact that we can have as we simply go about our lives and our work each day bearing the fruit of the Spirit and loving our enemies—doing good, blessing, and praying for those who mean us evil—and living out that love in simple and practical ways. That is the most important ministry we can have and it happens in our homes, our families, in our church, where we play and where we work.

Let us pray: Father, we asked in the collect that you would "grant that your people may love what you command". We ask that again. Grant us to love what you command. And remind us that your command is for us to love our enemies just as your Son loved his, praying for them even as they crucified him. Grant to us the faith to trust in Jesus and to submit to his lordship and as we do so, give us your Holy Spirit and make our hearts new. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Saint Luke* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1963), pp. 106-107.