

Epiphany 7 C
24 February 2019
St. Peter's
Text

Our scripture readings today lead us into the theme of forgiveness and mercy and grace.

We are called by God to forgive and live.

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One of the things my teachers told me at an early age was that I was good at big ideas.

I could write on transcendent topics like generosity and love and heaven and God like a philosopher.

I once gave a 5 minute speech on nothing. That was my topic – nothing. And that speech earned me an A in English class.

My classmates told me I had earned my B.S. and PhD in only 5 minutes of 9th grade.

The abstract world is where my mind goes automatically – and where my big thoughts look for meaning.

Forgiveness – grace – mercy – such big, lofty, spiritual abstractions that I could stand here and expound upon all morning.

...

But Jesus is not abstract.

Jesus does not allow his hearers to live with our heads in the clouds and our feet floating off the ground.

The life Jesus invites us into is so concrete we could lose our shirt, our coat, our money and our friends.

We could gain a black eye, broken jaw, and a reputation for being crazy because we don't repay hostility with hostility.

Listen to what our Lord says:

love your enemies! Do good to those who hate you. ²⁸ Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who hurt you. ²⁹ If someone slaps you on one cheek, offer the other cheek also. If someone demands your coat, offer your shirt also. ³⁰ Give to anyone who asks; and when things are taken away from you, don't try to get them back. ³¹ Do to others as you would like them to do to you.

Does Jesus really mean this?

I love the Golden Rule – don't you?

That's the one where I give you a box of chocolates so that you give me one in return.

I do you a favor so you owe me one in return.

I am kind to you so that you are kind to me.

...

But wait – that's not what Jesus says, is it?

“If you love only the people who love you, why should you receive a blessing? Even sinners love those who love them!

³³ And if you do good only to those who do good to you, why should you receive a blessing? Even sinners do that!

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³⁴ And if you lend only to those from whom you hope to get it back, why should you receive a blessing? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount!

The life Jesus is offering is not based on reciprocity – the notion of this favor for that favor.

The word “deserve” has no place in his vocabulary.

The life Jesus is calling us into is God's life.

And in relation to God, we don't deserve what we receive and we don't get what we deserve.

Jesus speaks, instead, of showing mercy and receiving grace.

Showing mercy to those who hurt us, who insult us, who treat us badly.

Does Jesus mean we should let bullies get away with abusing us?

Does he mean that we should just walk away with our tails between our legs?

No – Jesus says to counter insults with blessing.

That is done face to face – standing tall and letting those who hurt us know that they have hurt us, but we will not hurt them back.

That doesn't mean there aren't consequences – but rather, that as injured parties, we will not seek revenge.

We will not hold grudges and we will not exploit those who hurt us.

Jesus himself sets the example as he hangs on the cross.

He does not downplay the misery of his suffering or try to run away from it.

He does not make hostile gestures at his enemies or hurl angry profanities at us.

Instead, he faces his enemies, speaks forgiveness and shows mercy in his vulnerability to suffer death at our hands.

Do to others as you would have them do to you.

Show mercy, forgive, love with God's gracious generosity

– not expecting any return.

Does Jesus really mean that?

The bean counters among us can already see that the economics don't work.

Those who lend and lend without demanding return will eventually go bankrupt.

But not in the divine economy of Jesus' life.

In that economy, there is unending replenishment of God's gifts that we lavishly share.

It is an Easter economy – a life whose days are no longer numbered, but eternal.

Jesus, whose numbered days came to an end on the cross, was raised from the dead!

Now his days are no longer numbered.

His eternal life is the source of the grace, mercy, and forgiveness we receive and give.

And it is the source of

- the food we share with the hungry,
- the clothes we share with the naked,
- the hospitality we extend to the stranger,
- the visits we make to the sick and imprisoned,
- and the cup of water we give in Jesus' name to the thirsty.

...

One last thing. Did you know Jesus likes brown sugar?

At least, it seems that way, because he talks about measuring generosity like we measure brown sugar for cookies – packed down and filled to overflowing.

The generosity of spirit and of physical aid that Jesus invites us to share is not carefully measured—precisely leveled off – it is poured out without stopping. . .with reckless abandon.

So throw away the grudges you hold against others,

let go of the impulses to seek revenge,

and stop wallowing in the mire of being annoyed.

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Instead, speak the truth in love and show mercy where none is expected.

Face those who hurt you with forgiveness.

Be generous with God's love and liberal with God's grace.

Jesus has promised that we will experience the same abundance and lavish blessing from our heavenly Father.

...

Look! – won't we soon see and hear our Lord share his healing peace with us with outstretched arms so that we can pass that peace to others?

Yes, indeed.

See! -- won't that banquet table soon be filled with the very body and blood which pours out abundant forgiveness and grace for our many sins against God?

Yes indeed.

Taste and see that the Lord is good.

Then go and be that merciful goodness of the Lord for others.

In the Name of the father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R3Qj7MebpsQ>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h1Lu5udXEZI>