

Trinity VI Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins

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God is kind unto the unthankful, and to the evil.

This is the gospel of Jesus Christ: God is kind to the ungrateful and to the wicked. This is the Good News: God is good to the evil and gracious to the ungracious. God is kind to the ungrateful and to the wicked. So, which are you? Are you unthankful or are you evil? Are you ungrateful or are you wicked? For if you are neither, there is no good news for you. But if you are both, if you know yourself to be wicked and ungrateful, then I have great news for you! God is kind to the ungrateful and to the wicked.

People - you and I - are selfish and greedy, mean and ungrateful. We can hardly love our families and friends, let alone God or our enemies. Well, if we find loving God above all else to be difficult, what of loving our neighbours as ourselves? And then

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what of loving our enemies? For Jesus is here speaking not of kindness towards those inside our community – those of our own faith, or race, or politics, or language, or culture, or class, or financial status - but loving those on the outside, our enemies, the strangers, the destitute.

Yet Jesus says, “Love your enemies!” It sounds impossible.

We all desire to love and to be loved, and we are all sinners...in so many ways unloving and unlovable. That is the tragedy and mess of our lives, our marriages, our families, our friendships and our communities. We want to love and be loved, yet we are so unloving and unlovable. But God intervenes, God’s love for us changes us. In his eyes, we are loveable, and in his love, we become loving.

What Jesus is talking about in today’s Gospel reading is impossible, from a human point of view, as a matter of our effort or work. But as the work and gift of God, all things are possible. By the gift of God’s love in Jesus Christ, who died for us, and by the power of the

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Holy Spirit in us, the unloving and unlovable become the beloved and loving.

Love your enemies. You know what people say about the drunk, about the addict, about the angry person. He is his own worst enemy. Well, let's get honest. That doesn't apply to just some people. That's true of all of us. Think for a moment about your own life, even in the past week. Can you not see and recognize, how you and I are our own worst enemies? Love your enemy. That includes learning to love yourself. And we can only love ourselves and one another, when we recognize how loveable we really are, how beloved we are, in the eyes and heart of God.

So who can teach us how to love our enemies? Where is this teaching and power to be found?

Mercy and love are defined for us in Jesus Christ, his cross, his broken body and shed blood. For it is there, in Christ crucified, that we find out how to love our enemies. While we were yet sinners, and

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therefore his enemies, Christ died for us. He did the greatest good to those who hated him, and he blessed and pardoned his persecutors. They took his cloak, and he gave them his life. He is the Son of the Father, and his death was and is the supreme expression and revelation of the kindness of God, even to the unthankful and to the evil.

In Christ, God prays for those who spitefully use him. Look on Christ crucified, and know that God has loved you even while you were his enemy. God has done good to you while you hated him. God has blessed you while you cursed, and God has prayed for you while you crucified him. Look and learn love. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. When you know and feel, when you are convicted and convinced, that God loved you while you were still his enemy, you know and have the power to love your enemies, even yourself. We cannot love one another, or

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even ourselves, unless we first know ourselves as beloved, unless we first know that God so loves us.

The Gospel is this: our Father God is kind unto the unthankful, and to the evil, and so must we be, if we are to live as his children.

“Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.”

Jesus teaches us that the distinguishing quality of the Creator, the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, whom he claims is his Father and which relationship and status of Father and child he communicates with us, is mercy. This is the repeated lesson of God’s revelation. For example, when God showed himself to Moses, we read, in Exodus 34: “And the Lord passed by before Moses, and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.” We read in Psalm 103: “The Lord is full of compassion and gracious, long-suffering and of great goodness. And more, like as a

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Father pitieth his own children, even so is the Lord merciful unto them that fear him.” St. Paul tells us God is rich in mercy in Ephesians 2.4, and James 5.11 reminds us that “The Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.”

So the message of this day, is that our salvation requires that we not only receive that mercy of God in Jesus Christ, but that we show it as well. “Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy.” And we are warned in James 2.13: “For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy.” Two times, Jesus quotes Hosea 6.6: “I will have mercy and not sacrifice,” and he tells us to go and learn what that means. At the least, it means that our understanding of righteousness, what it means to be a righteous person, must centre around mercy.

The good news is, that we who were rebellious servants, have been adopted and saved as redeemed children. It is our greatest privilege to know and call God our Father. The call then is to live as

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forgiven children. As we have been adopted and redeemed through Jesus Christ and in the Holy Spirit, the power to live as such can only come through Jesus Christ and in the Spirit. The greatest privilege is to call God our Father, and our greatest duty is to imitate our Father, to live as children of the Highest. This means to be merciful, as our Father also is merciful, for he is kind to the ungrateful and to the evil. This is the gospel of Christ. Amen.