

Luke 6 vv 27 – 38

J Lasman Sermon text 10th September 2020

If the truth be told, I found it quite difficult to write this sermon. Jesus' words in this gospel passage are very clear and direct (even accounting for a degree of hyperbole) and therefore immensely challenging.

Challenging to me not only in terms of how to apply them in a modern setting but also because I'd love there to be a prescriptive and simple answer to how I should interpret them, and of course there isn't one.

As I've reflected on this passage, its challenge to me has crystallised in a number of different ways. Firstly I've struggled to know how to apply Jesus' demands to turn the other cheek, to give and not count the cost, not to demand repayment of loans and so on . How do I interpret these instructions into a modern setting where our judicial and financial systems (based on Judaic law) provide frameworks to bring people to justice if they steal, abuse or fail to pay their debts? Is Jesus asking me to be a door mat and simply allow people to walk all over me? Surely this isn't what God would see as the best life ever for me or making Jeremy (or indeed any one of us) fully whole or at peace .

Jesus goes on to talk about loving your enemies, those that hate you. As I was reflecting on this, I asked myself who are my enemies, who hates me? For sure some people may not like me, may disapprove of my lifestyle or my sexual orientation, but I don't think I've really got enemies or that people really hate me. So what would Jesus have me do in this context?

As I've contemplated this, I've begun to realise that this attitude reeks of classic middle class white privilege. Exactly the frame of mind that the Black Lives Matter movement has shone a spotlight on. If my skin tone, my gender, my education or my relative wealth were different would I be able so easily, and perhaps somewhat complacently, to make the statement that I have no enemies? And in that context how much harder to be obedient to Jesus' commands to love those that hate me, to constantly turn the other cheek, to give and keep on giving with no expectation of reward. If I put myself into a poor black community in Chicago or Detroit, or closer to home in Tower Hamlets or Peckham how would I react to these clear demands from Jesus?

Of course I have fallen into the trap of trying to interpret Jesus' words as an individual. The context of this passage is the calling of the Apostles, and in Luke's gospel it follows on from the 'Blessings and Woes' teaching, the equivalent of the beatitudes in Matthews gospel. So I'm sure that this teaching is preparing the early church both for the persecution that is to come and also how they should respond to it . We, of course, are blessed to live in a country where we are free to worship God openly and where our Christian faith is embedded in our (unwritten) constitution.

I'm sure many of us reacted with horror at the talk from Open Doors 2 weeks ago where even in India, the largest democracy in the world, our Christian brothers and sisters are facing discrimination and hardship for their faith. They are called not only to persevere but to love their enemies, to give, to turn the other cheek. And we in the comfort and security of Witney are being asked to be faithful in prayer not only for the protection and safety of the persecuted Church but also that the Church may exhibit these sacrificial behaviours in love. Again, my white middle class, middle England sensibilities make me struggle with this double whammy calling - Not only accept persecution but then show love and graciousness to your persecutors??

All really tough challenges to face up to. But one last reflection. Jesus isn't asking us to behave any differently from the way in which He behaves Himself . These words in the gospel reflect the

character of our Sovereign God . God our creator, full of power and might, constantly turns the other cheek when we deny God, when we drift away or fail God . Our Sovereign God is constantly giving, full of love and compassion irrespective of who we are and what we do . God longs to bless us with the gift of the Holy Spirit in our hearts so that She might fully transform us and help us to respond fruitfully to Jesus challenges in this gospel passage .

And as I have begun to understand this, my response and I hope, our response, is to bow my head in worship and wonder at the grace and love and power of our Sovereign Lord.