

## February 24, 2019

### Epiphany 7

### Another Way: The Hard Way

#### Ancient Reading ~ Luke 6:27-38

Jesus continued, “To you who are ready for the truth, I say this: Love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst. When someone gives you a hard time, respond with the energies of prayer for that person. If someone slaps you in the face, stand there and take it. If someone grabs your shirt, giftwrap your best coat and make a present of it. If someone takes unfair advantage of you, use the occasion to practice the servant life. No more tit-for-tat stuff. Live generously.

Here is a simple guiding principal for behavior: Ask yourself what you want people to do for you; then grab the initiative and do it for *them!* If you only love the lovable, do you expect a pat on the back? Run-of-the-mill sinners do that. If you only help those who help you, do you expect a medal? Garden-variety sinners do that. If you only give for what you hope to get out of it, do you think that’s charity? The stingiest of pawnbrokers does that.

I tell you, love your enemies. Help and give without expecting a return. You’ll never—I promise—regret it. Live out this God created identity the way our God lives toward us, generously and graciously, even when we’re at our worst. God is kind; you be kind.”

Don’t pick on people, jump on their failures, criticize their faults—unless, of course, you want the same treatment. Don’t condemn those who are down; that hardness can boomerang. Be easy on people; you’ll find life a lot easier. Give away your life; you’ll find life given back, but not merely given back—given back with bonus and blessing. Giving, not getting, is the way. Generosity begets generosity.”

#### Contemporary Reading ~ adapted from Henri Nouwen in “Turn My Mourning Into Dancing: Finding Hope In Hard Times”

This is not easy, of course, largely because of the ways we continue to crave attention, affection, influence, and power, even after hearing God’s word that we are all God’s beloved. These needs are born from our wounds and never seem to be satisfied. When we try to find an explanation for these wounds, we discover how they have been inflicted on us by people who are needy people themselves. Through the generations there seems to run a chain of wounds and needs. And when we try to avoid inflicting wounds ourselves, we discover that even with our best intentions, we cannot avoid encountering people who feel rejected, misunderstood, or hurt by us. Thus, there seems to be a long chain of interlocking wounds and needs that stretch back into the long past and forward into our future. This picture drives us to turn love into a kind of mechanical exchange: “I will love you if you love me; I will give to you if you give to me; I will lend to you if you give me the same amount.”

As long as we continue to search for our deepest sense of who we are among other people, we will end up dividing the world into people who are for us and people who are against us, people who accept us and people who reject us—friends and enemies.