

Sunday Sermon
February 23, 2025

Luke 6:27-38

I begin today by telling you a story as it is written in a book by Steve Chalke entitled, *The Lost Message of Jesus*.

Steve Chalke was trained as a British Baptist minister. He is a businessman, a savvy social activist, a former United Nations' Special Adviser on Human Trafficking and he founder of the Oasis Charitable Trust which is a huge organization that develops and supports charitable institutions all around the globe. Steve doesn't pastor a church anymore. Rather he has taken his spiritual beliefs and put them into practice through charitable business ventures throughout the world. I had the pleasure of meeting and speaking with Steve at clergy conferences in London.

So here the story that Steve Chalke tells.¹

Today in this passage from Luke, we talk about Moving our Fences.

This passage is really one of the more densely packed sections of wisdom scripture. And while one can hear the Hebrew wisdom tradition in Jesus' words in these chapter 6 verses, there is a big innovation dropped into this tradition here. Jesus presents a radical shift in an inclusionary direction. What Jesus is describing in these words is "moving the fences."

In times of need, or periods of crisis- when we are worried or fearful, there are two choices we can make. We can sequester our resources, isolate ourselves and barricade against the challenging situation. We can react as if our survival is based on the destruction of another. The destruction of another group of people, idea, or an institution.

The other choice we can make to recognize that the needs of one person or one group reflect the needs of the whole community. Your need is really my need too. Your need for housing, a job, to be loved, respected and cared for are my needs too. To do so is to recognize that we are one body. With this choice we expand the boundaries of caring for ourselves to include caring for another.

Only in our imaginations can we envision ourselves as individual entities, separate and free from one another.

God has not made us that way. Only in our imaginations, where we exclude the divine spark of God that resides in all of us, can we suppose that we are not affected by one another.

And only by the hardening of our hearts can we fortify the myth that we are stronger and safer when we exclude God's mandate to love.

Certainly we learned this in the COVID-19 pandemic experience, didn't we?

In the passage from Luke, Jesus asks us to Turn the other cheek, care for the lowly, love our enemies, refrain from judgement and condemnation. Show one another mercy.

It's a long list. **Is** this passage from Luke hard to hear? Yes, yes it is. This is Jesus at his most incarnate. He is a man who is part of the human condition, and he is speaking divine wisdom. It is raw and demanding. If there are places in scripture where I wonder if what we are reading are really the words of Jesus, it is not here. These constructs that Jesus is laying out before us aren't smoothed out by the pen of human influence.

When have you heard another human speak to you in this way? -**who** wasn't quoting Jesus. Who other than Jesus turns our ethical world upside down with such abandon as he who speaks the words of this passage? Who speaks with such clarity of what is right and wrong?

Jesus offers to us concepts of love, sacrifice, altruism that are described in a way that are absolutely radical to our nature. These are Godly words, Godly axioms.

And what is remarkable is that Jesus expects us to do all of these things.

Turn the other cheek, care for the lowly, love our enemies, refrain from judgement and condemnation.

Jesus believes that we can.

This Litany of ethical expectations might seem impossible for us to measure up to if Jesus hadn't been such an excellent example of how to do so. "Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned" he said. While Jesus did not condemn people, he condemned their actions. He spoke with and showed respect to those with whom he disagreed. In all ways possible he kept communication flowing. He built his fence outward to include invite and include everyone to hear God's words. He included his critics and followers alike. He made it clear that the love he shared he shared with everyone.

What he did **not** do while expressing God's love for all was remain silent concerning the hurt inflicted by one group of people on another. He verbally and spiritually held them accountable to God. Pray for those who hate, those who abuse, but show no tolerance for their sinful actions. Love your enemies, says Jesus, but do good. Do not become one of them.

That's because Jesus doesn't relegate our lives, actions or limit our abilities to this world. Jesus sees us for what we can be, what we can be when we step into God's world. Jesus sees us as able to transform, to transcend the limited thinking that plagues humankind, to transcend the tiny hearts that prevent us from loving when loving is really hard.

Jesus knows that we can give our coat, give our last shirt. Jesus knows that we can feed one another when hungry, tend to one another when we are in need. Jesus knows that we have the spiritual capacity to do all such good works. He knows that we have the spiritual will to follow him.

Jesus sees us as able to transcend a self-focused life. He sees us as able to Love. And because we love we can move the Fences.

In the poem Mending Wall by Robert Frost he wrote:

“ Good Fences make Good Neighbors.”

Might Jesus have said, “Good Neighbors know how to make Good Fences.”

It is admittedly absolute hubris on my part to suggest what Jesus might have said to Robert Frost should they have met on two paths diverging in a yellow wood.

What Jesus did say is

“give, give abundantly and fully. And as you give it will be given back to you.

Be generous, Jesus says, be lovingly generous of all things and with all people. In this you too will be made whole in the sight of God.

Amen

1. Chalke, Steve and Alan Mann, *The Lost Message of Jesus*, Grand Rapids, Zonderan, 2003, p29.