

The Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany

February 24, 2019

**Our Savior's Way
Worshiping Sundays 8:00, 9:30, & 11:00 AM
Pastor Labuhn**

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Between 2003 to 2005, a number of former teachers and school administrators in New York reported that their homes had been vandalized. Car tires needed to be replaced because roofing nails had been scattered across their driveways. Paint was splashed on their garage doors and mailboxes. It seemed like something was happening every two weeks or so, yet it went on for two years. As it turned out, it wasn't a rebellious student as some thought, but rather a former co-worker who was still angry about poor performance reviews that he received some 30 years ago.

Even today it seems, we are hearing in the news more often of people who retaliate for the wrongs that they feel they've suffered. They plan in advance, then execute their own form of justice on their perceived enemies knowing that in the end, they might even lose their lives. This was the case the other weekend when an employee in Aurora, Illinois found out that he was being fired from his job. It's a story that we are becoming numb to because again and again, we hear these types of stories of people, who are unable to cope and respond in a way that might bring about peace in their lives and in the lives of others.

God wants us to live differently. He reveals His Glory through Jesus, who tells us to live in a way that brings about a better outcome and is pleasing to God. While much of the world already does good to those who are good to them, loves those who love them, and does favors for others so that they might receive favors in return, Jesus tells us that more is expected. Preparing his disciples to be sent out into the world, He says to those who would listen, ***“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who treat you badly. And if someone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other one also. If someone takes away your coat from you, go ahead and give them your shirt as well. Give to everyone who begs from you, and from the one who takes away your goods, don’t demand to have them back.”*** (Luke 6:27-30)

Take a moment to think about the last time when you felt you were wronged. Not just slighted, but a time when someone did you wrong. How did you want to respond? Did it motivate you to love them? Did you want to do good to those who hated you? Did you bless those who cursed you? Prayed for those who treated you badly? My guess is that your seemingly natural reaction, like mine, would be different than that - something more along the lines of feeling hurt, then judging and condemning, feeling like the one who wronged you, deserved to be wronged in return. Why do you suppose that we react this way? Sin is alive within us. It does not want us to love our enemies, do good to those who hate us, bless those who curse us or pray for those who treat us badly. And even though we all know the “Golden Rule,” we fail to live up to the standard that Jesus has for his disciples, time and time again.

Unlike the thoughts from a shallow Christian, Jesus Himself would demonstrate the kind of deep, abiding self-sacrificing love He was talking about. He was mocked and beaten by the soldiers, who took and divided up his clothes amongst themselves. He was hated and cursed by the teachers of the law, who watched Him hang on the cross. Yet as He died for the sins of the whole world, He prays,

“Father, forgive them for they know not what they are doing.”
(Luke 23:34)

Many in the world simply do not understand this Gospel message. Yet, it’s through this Gospel message that we are called to be His disciples. So that as we love our enemies, do good to those who hate us, bless those who curse us, and pray for those who treat us badly, they too might come to know the self-sacrificing love that Christ has for them as well. 1 Peter 2:21-25 says, ***“For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving an example, so that you might follow in His steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but continued entrusting Himself to Him who judges justly. He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”***

We know that through Jesus, we have received not what we deserve but what we do not deserve, that is love, mercy, and goodness. So, as we have been called by the Gospel, reborn in the waters of Holy Baptism and have received His Holy Spirit, each of us to show abiding, self-sacrificial love to our enemies, to do good to those who hate us, bless those who curse us, and pray for those who hate us. When that happens on a consistent basis, He works through us to reveal His Glory through His Son, Jesus Christ.

God is kind and merciful to ungrateful and evil people, like you and I. Take a look at the video that’s been prepared for you this morning. They are some thoughts from a shallow Christian...

Christ’s deep, abiding love for us and the forgiveness that we receive from Him, we share with others. We don’t take advantage of our enemies, nor should we hold onto a grudge against our enemies because as Jesus tells us in verse 38, ***“... with the measure that we use, it will be measured back to us.”*** Instead, we offer forgiveness that we have received from Christ. Ensuring that

our witness in loving even our enemies comes from Him so that we might be blessed as He works to make a world of difference in people's lives, helping them to live better, God-pleasing lives. And when this happens, expecting nothing in return, God promises that our reward will be great in heaven, for we WILL BE sons and daughters of the Most High.

In Jesus Name. Amen.