

In the Name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

### Intro

We don't get this long of an Epiphany Season very often – and we still have one more week to go.

So we get the special treat of being able to dabble some more in Jesus' "Sermon on the Plain" – and look into it a little deeper beyond the Beatitudes with which it begins.

### I Gospel

A. In the "Sermon on the Plain," Jesus is teaching his Disciples, and us, just what it is that he has come to do and teach – what this "Kingdom of God" is all about.

1. First of all we learn that this is a Kingdom based not on vengeance and violence – but a Kingdom based on God's love.

2. In other words, this NEW LIFE Jesus has come to bring is a complete reversal of the world's values.

3. This of course is best seen in the **Beatitudes** themselves.

4. Jesus begins with blessings for the Poor, the Hungry, the Weeping and the Outcast;

- and then adds woes on the Rich, the Full, the Laughing, and the Insiders.

6. For you see, the values of the world lead people to focusing on their own needs and desires in a physical sense, here and now.

7. But Jesus turns these values inside out, insisting that people focus on the Kingdom of God and their spiritual needs instead.

B. Then he begins to tell them about God's Kingdom and how they can live it out in their own lives.

1. Jesus calls his followers to a way of life that reaches beyond worldly understanding and expected behavior – and instead to open themselves to the living of God's love.

2. He essentially is turning the world upside down to encourage people to live God's way instead of the world's way.

3. *“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.” (Lk 6:27-28)*

4. If that's not a reversal of the world's values, I don't know what is.

5. Jesus is calling for a new standard – one based not on getting even, but on LOVE – God's love.

## II. Love

A. Perhaps this might be a good time for a quick refresher on love.

1. Now, before you groan and say, “We just had Valentine's Day – we know all about love;” remember that in the poverty of English we only have one word for love – in Greek there are THREE words for love.

2. In English, we say:

- I love ice cream
- I love my wife and family
- I love God
- I love the Dodgers
- *Enthusiastically*: I love it
- *Sarcastically*: I love it
- We abuse the word LOVE all the time.

3. Greek, on the other hand, has 3 words for love: eros – philios – and agape.

4. Eros describes a love of passionate devotion such as the love of one's spouse – it's the root of our word "erotic".

5. Philos describes the warm affection for our nearest and dearest – as in Philadelphia the "City of Brotherly Love"

- I philios my friends – or the Dodgers

6. The kind of love that Jesus is talking about is Agape – our love for God and compassion towards others.

- Wikipedia describes it as - "the highest form of love, charity and the love of God for humanity and of humanity for God"

- It means that no matter what that person does to us we will never allow ourselves to desire anything but their highest good.

7. And it is this kind of love that Jesus is talking about when he calls us to "*Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.*" (Lk 6:27-28)

8. So this LOVE, as one commentator put it "is not an emotional state, but an attitude and mode of action that wills the good of another."

- REPEAT

B. Jesus then sums all this up for us in what has come to be called "The Golden Rule:"

*"Do to others as you would have them do to you."*

1. We have heard this so much that we sometimes take it for granted, or become numb to it.

2. Yet, the unique thing about this saying is not that it exists, but in the way it is stated in a POSITIVE light.

3. Sayings similar to this in other religions are in a negative format – "Don't do what you don't want done to you."

4. But here, Jesus turns it around to say, *“Do to others as you would have them do to you.”*

5. It’s not terribly hard to keep yourself from doing something you don’t want done to you;

- but it is a very different thing to go out of your way TO DO TO others what you WOULD WANT them to do to you.

6. Once again, Jesus with his new life of love is reversing the values and standards of the world.

7. And then Jesus goes on to show how this can be lived out.

C. Jesus says, *“I say to you that listen, Love our enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.”*

1. And then he goes on to say, *“If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt.”*

2. Now to people living in an occupied country where this kind of thing happened all the time, these were revolutionary ideas.

3. The usual way to deal with enemies would be to repay them in kind;  
- but not so in the new life of God’s Kingdom.

4. To those who are enemies – LOVE is commanded:  
- to those who hurl curses – blessing is called for;  
- and for those who cause mental or even physical pain – the response to PRAY for that person.

5. In other words, we are to love the unlovable, do good to those who deserve no good – and by so doing, live out the Kingdom of God.

6. Or as the Presiding Bishop likes to say, *“If it’s not about love – it’s not about God.”*

### III Living in the Kingdom

A. Let me tell you a true story – that I have permission to tell.

1. A friend of mine worked in the finance department at her work.
2. One of the vendors she had to deal with on a regular basis was a real jerk.
3. He had a mean personality, and told jokes that weren't funny and often off color and was just not a nice person.
4. It got so that every time his number came up on the caller ID screen, she just wanted to let it go to voice mail – except she would just have to deal with it later and end up calling him back.
5. So she tried a different tactic – every time his number showed up, she would pray for him before answering – nothing major, just a bullet prayer: “Lord help this guy, he is obviously unhappy in his life...”
6. And little by little things began to change – he wasn't such a jerk to her over the phone – he didn't need to tell stupid jokes, because they were having a conversation – they had a relationship.
7. So did praying for this guy make my friend a better person – maybe – perhaps is softened her attitude towards him as well – who knows – but life changed – their relationship changed – and for the better.
8. Here was a person who turned the other cheek – who prayed for her tormentor – and was able to bring a little bit of the Kingdom of God into the life of another.
9. He died shortly thereafter – hopefully in a better place and with a better relationship with God.

B. Think about yourself and your life.

1. Who are the people you have difficulty with?
2. We're too nice to say we have enemies – so who do you have difficulty with – at work, at home, on the freeway, even at church?

3. Now ask yourself: “Am I being LOVING to that person?”

- “Am I watching out for THEIR best interest?”

4. And then think about what you might be able to do better.

5. Pick out **one** person with whom you are having problems and decide to start loving that person and treating them the way you want to be treated – and see what happens.

6. Think about them in a positive way – when they irritate you , remember that God loves them and so should you – **pray** for them – and really mean it.

7. Just go one person at a time, and see what Love can do.

### Conclusion

You know, the truly amazing thing about this gospel is that Jesus says we can do this.

God knows us and made us the way we are.

What an amazing compliment that God believes that we have this potential within us to love our enemies.

As we work to bring about God’s Kingdom here among us, let us strive to live this life of love – reversing the world’s values – and answering the call of Christ – hearing Jesus’ words and doing them.

And remember, “If it’s not about Love – it’s not about God.”

### Let Us Pray

God of kindness, interrupting our vicious cycles of resentment and revenge: teach us to walk the way of forgiveness beyond all accounting and to love the gift that has no measure; through Jesus Christ, who died for all. AMEN.

(Shakespeare p.85)