

Luke 6: 17-36

Two weeks ago, on Friday night, governor general Michael Jean said, “I declare open the Vancouver games”.

Those were performative words. That is, they did what they named.

Before Ms. Jean spoke, the games were not open. After she did, they were.

It was like when a police officer says, ‘you are under arrest’. If he says it, you are.

Or, when a minister says, “I now pronounce you, husband and wife”.

Looking at his disciples, Jesus said, “**Blessed** are you who are poor, who are hungry, who weep, who are hated...”

When Jesus says this, it is done. Things don’t look any different than they did a moment before, but everything is different now. Jesus has declared God’s blessing on the poor, the hungry, those whose eyes are filled with tears and who are hated.

To be clear, we are not talking **here** about being poor in spirit or anything like that. Poor means that there is too much month and not enough money.

And then Jesus says, ‘Woe’ to all the opposites.

Woe to the rich, the well-fed, the ones having a great time and the people that everyone speaks well of. It is a warning not to think of wealth and success as the sign of God’s blessing. These words leave us feeling uncomfortable.

Luke is picking up on the Hebrew prophets who knew that the only way someone could be rich was at the expense of the poor. We should not be so sure that the arrangement is different today.

So, blessed are the poor, the clock is ticking for the rich!

It sounds like the start of a revolution. When will this happen? When will the poor and hungry rise up and take what is theirs?

That is what we would expect to happen.

That is the story of human history. It is the old story of rise and fall of empires. Is that what Jesus is talking about?

It is amazing that after these promises of blessing and warnings of woe, Jesus' next words are,

“Love your enemies.”

This kingdom will not come by the poor gaining power and overturning the rich, but by walking the way of Jesus.

It is the way of trust.

We are used to talking about trusting that Jesus forgives our sins and that we are right with God through faith in him. We trust Jesus when we close our eyes in death.

But this is different. This is about trusting Jesus with our lives. Or, trusting that Jesus will lead us into that blessed life by doing things that seem just plain dumb.

'Love your enemies.'

'Do good to those who hate you'.

'Bless those who curse you.'

'Pray for those who mistreat you'.

And here's the one that shocked me this week....

"If someone strikes you **repeatedly** on one cheek, turn the other to him also".

Isn't that wild?

I always imagined it that someone hits you once on one cheek, that Jesus says, "turn the other cheek." But I looked up the word, it means "to strike repeatedly".

Jesus goes on, "if you love those who love you, where's the joy in that?" "How is that gracious?"

Even bike gang members or drug dealers do that.

Love your enemies, do good to them and lend to them without expecting anything back.

This is crazy hard.

It is so tempting to move along quickly to something that sounds more reasonable. But these are words we need to take at face value instead of blurring them or brushing them off or making them 'spiritual'.

If there is an exception we need to grant, it will be for the physical safety of bullied kids and spouses.

For all other situations we need to allow ourselves to be cornered and pinned down by these words from Jesus. It is also tempting to say that these words refer to 'private and personal behaviour' but not to the business or sports or political worlds. If Jesus is really Lord of all, his words apply to every area of life. And **these words** of his apply to every area of life.

"Love your enemy".

Your political opponent, your business competitor, your on-ice enemy?

Our instinctive reaction is to get even, to settle a score. When we see ourselves as poor and oppressed, we want what we see as ours. It is very hard to love our enemies, or to love those who have hurt the ones we love.

It is hard for us as guys, the mix of adrenaline and testosterone makes us great warriors, not such great peacemakers. But I think it is just as hard for women. You women have your own effective ways of getting even.

Abraham Lincoln was one Christian leader who saw the beauty of what Jesus is saying here. He said, "I destroy my enemies when I make them my friends".

So let's spend some time thinking about **how** to actually do this:

1. Trust God with our basic human need for justice. God says, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay". Getting even is not our job. When we try to do that, we are trying to do God's work, and that can only lead to disaster.

2. Look to Jesus. Jesus is our living example of exactly how to do this. His greatest strength is seen in his self-control and in his **not** retaliating. Hebrews 11 says, “Look to him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you do not grow weary and lose heart”.
 - 2a Pray the prayer of Jesus. “Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.”
 - 2b. Try to remember that ‘while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us’. Try to be aware, even in your pain, that God in Christ has forgiven you.
3. Make use of the church. Loving our enemies looks pretty foolish out in the world. We need to be a fellowship of enemy lovers. That means that here, together, in our Bible studies, in our marriages, we need to help each other to love our enemies.
 - a. Here is one way we can help each other as spouses and as friends.

Audrey and I have learned this over time. When I have been hurt by someone, I need to talk about that hurt. All I need from Audrey is her attention and interest. I do not need her to join me in my anger. I do not need her to tell me what I should have done or said, or what I should say or do. All I need her to do is listen to understand. I do not need her opinion, and most of all again, I do not need her to become angry at the person who has hurt me. That is how feuds and fights get started. All I need her to do is listen and bless me with the responsibility for my own stuff. Exactly the same is true of what she needs from me. This, by the

way, extends to any issues each of us may have with our parents or siblings or even children.

If there is anything else either of us needs, advice or a different perspective, we need to ask for it.

Like I said, we have learned this over time, through trial and error and hard experience.

So, if your friend texts you that her boyfriend has been unkind, don't join her in her anger and hatred. Just listen.

4. One of the components of love is understanding. Try to understand the person who has hurt you or that you are in conflict with. It is hard to see that person as anyone other than the villain who is bringing you pain. But no one is purely evil.

Do you remember that in the first 18 months of the Iraq war, US soldiers were finding that Iraqi civilian drivers would not stop when ordered to stop at check points? When the car kept coming, the soldier would open fire. It turned out that the hand signal raised hand, palm out, meant 'come forward' in Iraq.

Love your enemy. Try to understand her. It could save a life.

5. Remember the summary that covers this section of Luke's gospel? All of what Jesus is doing here and all that he is teaching is in the power of the Spirit. The Spirit is the power we need to do the very thing that can feel weak, love our enemies. That is where the strength comes from, if we ask in Jesus' name.

Jesus lived what he taught. He lived it as he was challenged and betrayed, as false charges were used to convict him, even as his commitment to love his enemies, brought him to the cross. He died there and was buried. Surely that would be the end of this terrible advice.

Three days later Jesus was raised to life, for our forgiveness, for we too have lived as his enemies. His resurrection demonstrates that his life is the blessed life. He leads us into his kingdom if we walk in his way.

In his own words:

“Love your enemies: then you will be called sons and daughters of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful”.

The Lord be gracious to you.

The Lord be gracious to me.

And all God's people said, Amen.