

## Luke 6:27-38

<sup>27</sup>“But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, <sup>28</sup>bles those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. <sup>29</sup>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. <sup>30</sup>Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. <sup>31</sup>Do to others as you would have them do to you. <sup>32</sup>“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. <sup>33</sup>If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. <sup>34</sup>If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. <sup>35</sup>But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. <sup>36</sup>**Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.**

<sup>37</sup>“Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; <sup>38</sup>give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.”

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This morning's Gospel from Luke is chock full of powerful statements.

We are to love our enemies, do good to those who hate us, <sup>28</sup> bless those who curse us, and pray for those who abuse us. Is that a bit overwhelming, or what? But Jesus really means it. He says 'love your enemies' more than once.

Jesus, here in Luke's Gospel is in the midst of the 'Sermon on the Plain', similar to the one we may know better, the 'Sermon on the Mount' in the Gospel of Matthew. This is the 7th Sunday of Epiphany; Epiphany, the season of our Lord revealing himself. So what is He revealing here? <sup>31</sup> Do to others as you would have them do to you, lend expecting nothing in return. Be merciful he says. He does promise that our reward will be great.

Well here is what happened to me this week. I think it helps understand these strong directives from our Lord. Last Sunday a parent and grandparent asked whether their kiddies could be Confirmed. I don't know why I hadn't thought of the children. I said 'Yes, of course your children can be Confirmed.' Since last Sunday, I have discovered to my delight, that we have children in our Parish Family who want to be Confirmed when Bishop David is here on the Sunday after Easter. I am so pleased that we will have six children to present, along with the adults.

So we have begun Confirmation preparation for the children. Search online for short videos explaining Confirmation, something in one caught my attention! Wow! I was a bit startled, although I shouldn't have been.

The reason we are confirmed is

**not as a 'recognition of advancement or growth in the faith'.**

**Neither is Confirmation 'about claiming the faith as your own'.**

We do nothing to deserve Confirmation. All we do is **receive** the grace of God's Spirit so we can be sent out as witnesses. **God does all the work.** God acts through the Sacrament no matter, what age we are, and whether or not we understand everything or not. We do nothing to 'deserve' it. The sacrament of Confirmation is not about what we have achieved...but about receiving the grace of the Holy Spirit...neat eh?

That is free Grace – in this case the Grace, the free gift is the strengthened presence of the Holy Spirit.

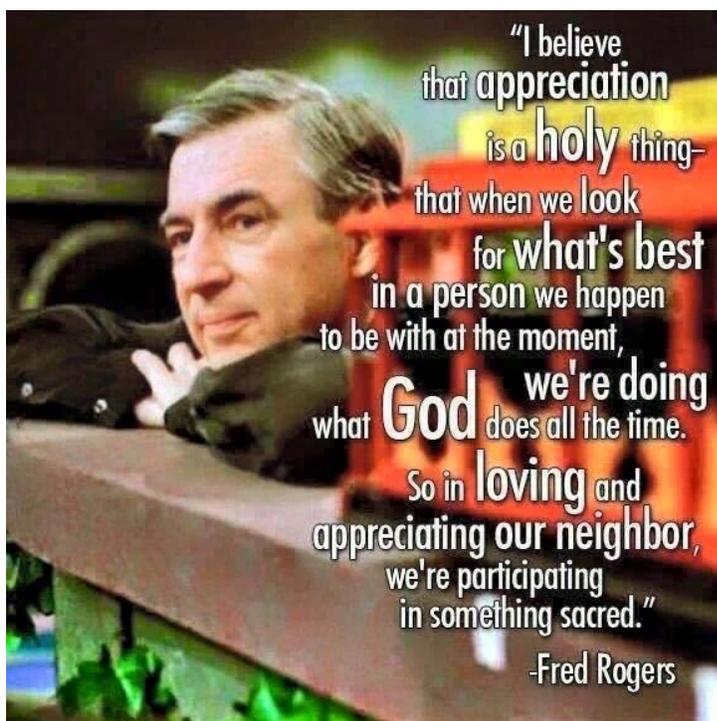
God is all about 'free grace'! God drenches us in his love and mercy and forgiveness. In baptism. In the Eucharist. Even though one betrays. . . Christ gives

his body given for you and for me. Imagine the time and effort we put into being old enough, knowing enough, being good enough . . . . To receive Holy Communion, not knowing that we never will be.

We receive all graces gifts through the Sacraments.

<sup>36</sup>**Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.** Jesus says.

That is the key. Our Lord, above all, is merciful. Because we are drenched in that mercy, we respond with mercy. Because we are forgiven every time we repent, we forgive. Because we are loved, we love. That is why we do the impossible and love our enemies, because that is the way of the Divine. In some way, when we dispense forgiveness, mercy and kindness for everyone indiscriminately, we echo our Lord and scatter grace – it is almost sacramental. Fred Rogers says it this way:



Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you. There have been dramatic examples of people and whole communities doing this.

Some of you will remember the **Amish school shooting** at their one-room schoolhouse in the community of Nickel Mines, in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, on October 2, 2006. Gunman Charles Roberts IV took hostages and

eventually shot ten girls aged 6–13, killing five, before committing suicide in the schoolhouse.

On the day of the shooting, a grandfather of one of the murdered Amish girls warned young relatives not to hate the killer, saying,

**"We must not think evil of this man."** Another Amish father said, **"He had a mother and a wife and a soul and now he's standing before a just God."**

An amazing drama of mercy and forgiveness unfolded. An Amish neighbour comforted the killer's family hours after the shooting and extended forgiveness to them. Amish community members visited and comforted Roberts' widow, parents, and parents-in-law. One Amish man held Roberts' sobbing father in his arms, reportedly for as long as an hour. The Amish set up a charitable fund for the family of the shooter. About 30 members of the Amish community attended Roberts' funeral. Marie Roberts, the killer's widow, wrote an open letter to her Amish neighbours thanking them for their forgiveness, grace, and mercy. She wrote, "Your love for our family has helped to provide the healing we so desperately need... Your compassion has reached beyond our family, beyond our community, and is changing our world, and for this we sincerely thank you.

Some commentators criticized the swift and complete forgiveness with which the Amish responded, arguing that forgiveness is inappropriate when no remorse has been expressed, and that such an attitude runs the risk of denying the existence of evil; others were supportive. Donald Kraybill and two other scholars of Amish life noted in their book Amish Grace: How Forgiveness Transcended Tragedy, that "letting go of grudges" is a deeply rooted value in Amish culture. Isn't 'letting go of grudges' a deeply rooted value for all of us as Christ's people? Isn't it what our Gospel this morning is all about?

The emphasis on forgiveness and reconciliation in the response of the Amish community was widely discussed in the national media. The School was torn down, and a new schoolhouse, the New Hope School, was built at another location.



Surely this is inspiring. Only 6 months after a vicious attack resulting in the loss of 5 little girls...another school was opened, named the New Hope School!

Does their example gives **us** New Hope? ...that we are capable of forgiving of starting fresh? Loving those who have hurt us or don't love us back goes against the grain. Loving your enemy does not mean you have to add them to your Christmas list, or make them your best friend. It doesn't mean you excuse their actions. It means you forgive them, with the knowledge that God is both merciful and just.

But we ourselves are forgiven, so loving both those who love us and those who don't, is the Christian way, the way toward our healing, the way to be more like our treasured Lord, the way to truly walk with our Lord. We cannot do this ourselves, but with God's abundant grace, we can...May we receive the grace we need and begin the road of love in earnest! Amen.

