

Sermon Preached on February 20, 2022 – Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany

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St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church, Yarmouth, ME 04096

Genesis 45: 3-11, 15

Psalms 37: 1-12, 41-42

I Corinthians 15: 35-38, 42-50

Luke 6: 27-38

Living for Mañana

Let me set the stage a moment because sometimes the message from Jesus this morning sounds...nice

Don't get me wrong, it sounds challenging – but the message this morning is kind of the stuff we expect to hear from Jesus – it's the stuff on calendars and in motivational images – it's about being good, nice people, isn't it?

Well, this week's text comes straight on the heels of last week's text

And, you'll recall that last week, Jesus came down and stood "on a level place" with the crowd and gave that powerful sermon where he proclaimed "blessed are the poor...the hungry...[and] those who weep" and "woa [whoa] to you who are rich...full...[and] laughing"

It was a sermon that, shall we say, was hard to digest!

And immediately on the heels of that sermon, we get today's text

Jesus starts by saying "But I say to you that listen" – in other words, "those of you who are *still* listening" – "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. 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. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you."

It just gets better and better – or harder and harder depending on your perspective

We, thankfully, get these lessons from Jesus dispersed over the course of a few weeks, can you imagine getting this sermon all in one sitting – it's a lot to take in

Last week Jesus leveled with us and shook up our ideas of what's comfortable and who's comforted with his sermon on the plain

Now, this week, Jesus pushes those who are *still* listening even more to our max: “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. 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. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you.”

There it is, the golden rule – “do to others as you would have them do to you”

These audacious acts of radical love – really, me?

I mean seriously, who does Jesus think we are? Saints?

Well, actually, yes, in a way

We are the resurrection people that Paul speaks about in his letter today – we are earthly, organic, embodied human beings – totally beautiful and completely capable of sinfulness and being just the worst sometimes – and we are Christ’s resurrection people, endowed by the Creator of the universe with the Spirit of love, mercy, and forgiveness utterly capable of bringing God’s presence into the here and now

“Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven” Paul wrote

Or as Martin Luther called it – *simul justus et peccator*, “simultaneously saint and sinner”

Constantly teetering on the see-saw of life, up and down, back and forth

It’s a mess, and it’s lovely

Jesus calls out to us in our lovely mess and says “Blesseds and whoas, I believe in you, you are capable, if you’ve made it this far in this sermon and you believe in me and in what we are growing together – namely the kingdom of God – then, I call you to live as if...live as if you were in that kingdom and love your enemies”

You know sometimes it has felt like in the church we have understood the kingdom of God that Jesus talks about to mean heaven – some lofty place where we’ll go to when we die

If we’re good Christians, we’ll get in the pearly gates – and once we’re there, it’s wonderful. That’s the kind of place where enemies do and can love each other and sit at the same eternal banquet feast

But, my friends, this is not actually how Jesus talked about the Kingdom, or as I prefer to say “kin-dom”

Jesus talked about how in his birth – and we heard this in Mary’s song, too – in his birth, Jesus was breaking in the kin-dom of God in our midst. The kin-dom of God is at hand

It is not the kind of thing that immediately made things better – because we are still simultaneously sinners as well as saints – but that “saint” part pulls us towards something greater

Some theologians use the word “prolepsis” to describe this belief – which Miriam Webster defines as “ the representation or assumption of a future act or development as if presently existing or accomplished”

Justo González, Cuban American theologian, describes it by saying that Christians are called to a “life lived out of expectation, out of a hope and a goal. And that goal is the coming Reign of God”

Christians, he says, are called “to live out of mañana”

Damon Garcia, a writer and public theologian, explains in his essay on this week’s lectionary texts, that “Mañana is Spanish for tomorrow, but it’s also used humorously to refer to any specified time in the future that isn’t now. To live out of mañana is not a life of procrastination,” [oh, this will happen mañana,] “but a life of hope and expectation for the world that tomorrow holds.”

Think of the possibility, the hope, the world that tomorrow holds – it’s magnificent

My imagination, my hope can go wild with anticipation!

All are housed! All are fed mañana!

Garcia continues, “We hope for and expect liberation from all oppression in God’s eternal freedom” – because that is exactly what Jesus preached!

“This hope is not a fickle emotion that soothes our hearts for a moment” as this morning’s text is often used to do. “This hope drives us to radically challenge the systems of oppression in our midst. Living in expectation for a liberated world tomorrow requires us to radically question the unjust social order of today”

Love for my enemy is not only a nice idea for me to think about, it is possible, because mañana we will be reconciled. I can do for others today because mañana someone will do equally for me.

I can live as if it were mañana - mañana is my inspiration, my hope – mañana is God’s promise – mañana is Mary’s song, Jesus’s sermon!

And we, who are the mess, who live in the messy world – we hear this calling and we long for it sincerely...but, I think, we also honestly fear it, we think “that is such a nice idea but it will never work! If I turn the other cheek, people will only think I am weak. The system will still win”

That kind of behavior doesn’t change systems

Ah, except it already has

We are living in the mañana of other peoples' ayer, other peoples' yesterday

Today is Sunday and it is part of a weekend when many folks don't have to work because Emma Goldman and Cesar Chavez believed in mañana.

Trans people have access to appropriate health care and can work and live safely – in the fullness of their identities – in so many settings today because Marsha P Johnson and Sylvia Rivera lived with the boldness and hope of mañana

People of all races attend school together, work side by side in professional fields, and live next to each other because Ruby Bridges, John Lewis, and Bayard Rustin bravely believed in the promise of mañana

“Think of the people throughout history who fought for the kind of change that they could never experience during their lifetime,” Garcia writes. “They spent their lives living out of this hope for the world to come.”

We live in the glow of their mañana faith

Can it be that we are capable of Jesus' bold commands this morning because we, too, believe in mañana?

Can it be that the love that Jesus calls us to in today's gospel text is powerful enough to change the world like that?

Yes! This is resurrection love, y'all

When Jesus said “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful” that's an invitation to show mercy with the force of the one who created the universe from nothing, who set all things into motion, who raised Jesus from the dead

When Jesus said “Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you” it was with the blessing and power of the Holy Spirit whose presence and influence in our lives was stirred up at our baptisms and marked on our heads for ever

What will we do with that kind of power – can we imagine loving our neighbor – can we be who God calls us to be today with mañana as our calling?

Gosh, I hope so

And, Lord, I need your strength

Jesus, I need your presence to help me love my enemies

I need the promise of your power to be the wind in my sails as I, very counter-culturally, lend without expectation of repayment

My gestures of faith may not be as bold as some of the great faithful witnesses of ayer, yesterday, but I nonetheless strive on and persist in the hope of mañana

we are earthly, organic, embodied human beings – totally beautiful and completely capable of sin and being just the worst sometimes – and we are Christ's resurrection people, endowed by the Creator of the universe with the Spirit of love, mercy, and forgiveness utterly capable of bringing God's presence into the here and now

May it be so, Amen.