

Luke 6 Sermon - Love your Enemies

Read Luke 6v20-36

Have you ever inhabited a really toxic workplace? One where people get ahead by backstabbing, treading on others, looking out for themselves, taking credit for other peoples achievements and blaming others for their mistakes? I hope not, but it is more common than you would think. It often comes from the top down - bosses who fail to take responsibility to protect those who work for them, and pass on blame for failures. And in such an environment it is hard not to get sucked in. Behaviour which would otherwise be unacceptable gets normalised. The *'yeah but'* response which excuses wrongdoing by pointing at someone else bad behaviour.

There is a real danger that our society is becoming more like that. Polarised, angry, intolerant. And everyone gets sucked into patterns of behaviour that they know are wrong but justify because everyone descends to the same level.

So it is important to ask what patterns of behaviour can change things for the better? How can we act in a way which not only doesn't make things worse, but is actually redemptive? Albert Einstein once said. *We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking that created them.* The sort of behaviour that has got us into this mess is not going to get us out of it.

Now if it is any consolation, the society of Jesus day was in an even worse mess. It was deeply polarised, a religious rightwing which excluded everyone, a corrupt government in collusion with foreign powers, and an undercurrent of rebellion which had bubbled up into violence. It was riven by blame, suspicion and anger and a profound sense of failure and a desire to be great again (actually...) And into that deeply dysfunctional world Jesus proclaims a radically different set of ethics.

Note that Jesus doesn't say be nice. People think what it means to be Christian is to be kind, to not tell lies, to give some money to charity. It is the primary school version of Christianity. Fine, but Christianity is far more sophisticated than that.

Jesus' ethical teaching is a totally new kind of thinking. It is unprecedented in human history. Love your enemies, be good to those that hate you, give without expecting anything in return. No one before, and few since have ever said this, never mind lived it out. If God came to earth you would expect him to live in a way which is radically different. And he does. The ethics of Jesus are so radical, so uncompromising, in reality we think - how is this even possible? *Christianity has not been tried and found wanting, it has been found hard and not tried.* GK Chesterton.

Luke 6 is sometimes described as the sermon on the plain in contrast to the sermon on the mount. It has some similarities, but some distinctions. Like a politician who has a stump speech but varies it depending on the context. It is preached to the disciples (v20), but they are not the only intended hearers. (v17) A vast crowd of onlookers and seekers are listening in, and what Jesus is doing is saying this is what it will be like if you follow me.

a) Don't think you are signing up to get rich and powerful, (v20) it will be uncomfortable, unpopular, and hard. Why? Because you have a job to do you are going to be like the prophets of the Old Testament (v23), standing up against the injustice of your society, challenging its wrongdoing, defending the vulnerable.

b) We are going to change the world. But not in the way you think. Not by anger and vengeance. The problem with 'an eye for an eye' is that it only continues the cycle of revenge. We are going to act towards people not how they deserve, but in a way that breaks that cycle and shows up the darkness of evil by shining a light of goodness and mercy.

And you might be thinking, that is very nice, but it will never work in the real world. And you might be right, except for one thing. This is how God is at work in the world. And be grateful for that. God loves his enemies, does good to those who don't deserve it and gives expecting nothing in return. How do we know? Because while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Can you live like this in practice? Well don't forget that is exactly how Jesus lives. He turns the other cheek, he loves his enemies, does good to those who hate him and prays for those that curse him. Can we live like that?

So back to that job in a toxic workplace. Imagine one day you get an email from the CEO of a really inspirational company who offers you a job. *The money won't be great, and you will have to work hard, and might be quite unpopular because we are upsetting a lot of vested interests, but we are going to change the way people do business, and we are building something revolutionary. Come and work with us.* So you hand in your notice. And for the next three months you inhabit that toxic environment in a very different way, because you are not invested in it in the same way any more, and you have nothing to lose.

- 1) You just don't worry about petty grievances so much any more and don't try and get even.
- 2) You look with sadness on unhappy and vindictive people and perhaps pray for them
- 3) You might give your stuff away - I'm not going to need this any more.
- 4) And you probably feel free to challenge what is wrong, and speak up against those in charge, and defend the victims.

That is quite a helpful picture of what Jesus taught his disciples to do.

You don't belong to this system any more, you are serving a new king.

27 'But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who do you wrong.

And in doing so you break the cycle of anger and you show peoples wrong doing for what it is by removing the *'yeah but'* excuse.

Conclusion

These are the highest standards imaginable, almost by definition standards that you will fall short of. But that doesn't mean we don't hold them up as the finest ideal. And we look at Jesus in a different way - he shows us how to live in the most dark and difficult places in a way that is liberated and transformational, how to confront evil without getting sucked in, and how to live lives which reflect the way that God is at work in the world.

v35 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.

So that is how Jesus invites us to live. And in doing so we are participating in what God is doing in the world. Will it work? well I can't promise that in the short term - God is often frustratingly patient, and you need to be too, but if we persevere we will see a world not only transformed but redeemed. Galatians 6:9: *"And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap a harvest , if we do not lose heart."*