

Discipleship Moment

Luke 6:27-38

I love conflict. I know that might sound strange, but let me explain: I love when two or more people hash out ideas or thoughts with each other. It's not that I love conflict per se, I just love the competition of ideas. I like duking it out intellectually with other people and arguing about important topics. I love logic and discourse. This love for conflict has gotten me in a lot of trouble in the past: one or two lost friendships and broken relationships with bosses and colleagues.

It seems that a lot of people are like me: they like being right. And in my worst moments, my drive to be right, to win, spurs me to treat those that I am interacting with like they are less than human: if they disagree with me there is something wrong with them. This is a common tactic in argument: it is called dehumanization.

It is the human condition to dehumanize other people. We do this in politics, in sports, and even in the consumer products we buy (I think about the classic Chevy vs. Ford, or Android vs. Mac debates). Even with the most trivial things (like cars or computers), we still treat people who don't agree with us or don't use the same products as us as subhuman. We treat them like they're stupid or morally inferior. Dehumanizing makes it easier to feel self-righteous. Dehumanizing makes us feel superior. This is most egregious in our political discourse: from "lock her up" to "basket of deplorables" our politicians are experts at dehumanizing—twisting their opponents' words and actions until they are given the worst possible meaning, then using that to attack and demean the person and turning others against them. This makes those that we disagree with our enemies, they are someone to beat, someone to squash, someone to utterly destroy.

But we learned about a new way yesterday. The Way of Jesus. Jesus' way of being human breaks this cycle of dehumanizing. Jesus' way of being human refuses to take part in treating people like problems to be solved or resources to be used. In our teaching on Sunday, we heard Jesus' command to "love your enemies." Jesus' command is essentially to humanize your enemies. Don't dehumanize them, don't look down on them, don't treat them like they need to be fixed. Love them. My enemy is someone who is loved by God; my enemy is someone who has hopes and dreams; my enemy is someone who has experienced deep friendships, broken trust, love, and joy.

Once we treat people the way they should be treated, the way God intended us to treat them, then we "heap coals on their head." We put to shame those who aim to hurt us, we rise above the human condition, we become the new kind of human. A Jesus kind of human.

This is what Jesus's goal was: to institute a new kind of people. A Jesus-people. To combat the ways of this world with rugged, persistent, unashamed love for those who wish us harm. This is what Jesus did on the cross: he used a shameful, violent punishment to heap burning coals onto the power structures of the world. By being overcome by those power structures, but raising back to life, he put to shame all of those violent power structures by revealing that they are ultimately powerless over him. They tried to kill him, it seemed like they succeeded, but they failed. This is the way of Jesus: success through sacrifice.

So now it's our turn. It is our turn to take on the mantle of Christ, to be filled with the Holy Spirit and live with his hands and feet. As Paul says, we must be "...the church, which is his body, the fullness of Christ..." The fullness of Christ on earth, the fullness of Christ in the Sauk Valley. Let us live in the fullness of Christ by succeeding through sacrifice.

Going Deeper

Use this resource to start conversations about this week's sermon for your personal devotions, with your family, or with your Life Group. You can use one question per day or all at once

1. Do you like getting into arguments? How about arguments on social media? Have you said something negative about someone you disagree with recently (either in person, or online)? Why? What drives people to do this?
2. What was most surprising about this teaching of Jesus to do? What is most difficult for you? Why?
3. Think about those people or groups who might be your "enemies" (even if you don't think of them that way). Who are these groups or individuals? Why would you consider them your enemies?
4. How are some ways you can love these individuals or groups? Be creative, think outside the box.
5. How can you achieve those things? Make an action plan to put some of those things in place.
6. If you have a broken relationship with someone, a co-worker, family member, etc. attempt to reconcile that relationship. Apologize to them, expecting no apology in return. Tell them (if it is appropriate) that you love them, and ask for forgiveness.