

Sermon for 23 February 2025 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany

Scriptures: Genesis 45:3-11, 15; Psalter (*Insert alternate leader and people*), Psalm 37:1-11, 39-40); Luke 6:27-38

Sermon

How long have you got? This is our last Sunday before the Transfiguration and the close of Epiphany season for this year.

That means an emphasis on the mature Jesus' insistence on forgiveness and generosity, lovingkindness above all. Even the fierce insistence on life beyond death that Paul is so fixated on doesn't stand out as much as Jesus' own stress on unending, permanent "Love your enemies. Do good to those that hate you." Make a vow to read this passage every day this week. How incredibly unlike what we're reading and seeing every day in our leadership. "Forgive, and you will be forgiven" ... "for the measure you give will be the measure you get back."

End of story!

We're being told Not to resist injustice. I put a copy of the latest issue of the Journal of The American Civil Liberties Union on Vivian's back table this morning, because I feel a call to support that admirable organization when every day another executive order and social media slam commentary gets the headlines.

So this is our dilemma. It wouldn't be so hard if we were on the bottom rungs of the ladder; but here we still have some power, some money, some safety net ... Jesus is speaking to crowds. He's invited to Pharisees' houses for dinner and tax collectors' homes. Do you think it's because he fears the top Jews and the Roman centurions will see him as a trouble-maker that he keeps going on in this vein?

Does God have other ways of bringing about justice?

Somehow, the folks who put together Luke's version of the Epiphany season want to make us see Jesus isn't a revolutionary, that his key aim was to head off a fight and not give brawlers and bullies any excuse. What does that say to us?

I wonder.

Let us pray.

Lord, help us. We are not right. Only you are, and that never settles an argument. All we can do is believe, and the only way we can do that is love one another. That puts you in charge, not us. You are mysterious. We never completely win anything. We'll never know enough. We

think we're smarter than our ancestors, but our knowledge is just fresh tracks in the wilderness , complicating things, and brings us closer to destroying your beautiful creation than ever before.

It's still beautiful. There's hope. You love us and everything else as much as ever ... maybe even more than ever, because you delight in it all sublimely; but we hear you. " Take it easy on one another," you say. "Reach out. Be first to forgive. Learn from me. Listen to Jesus and me. I know you can't understand it, but it's all one voice. You can learn it. Try. I'll help you. You can learn."

Amen..