

Sermon 23 February 2025 – Family Sunday

By Revd. Karen Adendorff

Have you ever been treated unfairly by someone? Or even bullied. Maybe someone took something that belonged to you, or said something mean to you? Or maybe you have been mean to someone else? Maybe you feel that your teachers give some students special treatment or that your parents favour your brother or sister over you. How did that make you feel? Yes...sad, angry. How did you react or how do you want to respond when these things happen? Hurt them back...say something mean to them as well... Yes

Well, in the Gospel reading today, Jesus tells that instead of hurting people back when they hurt us – instead of taking revenge - we should:

Love your enemies.

Do good to those who hate you

Bless those who curse you

Pray for those who abuse you

Lend, expecting nothing in return.

Be merciful, just as God is merciful

“Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you... for the measure you give will be the measure you get back” (Luke 6:37-38)

Sjoe! This is hard, hey. These lessons Jesus teaches are very difficult. When people do things to us that we think are unfair or mean, we often want to “get back” at them – get even.

Now to understand what Jesus is saying to us in practical terms, I want to tell you the story of Joseph, the son of Jacob. Have you heard the story of Joseph (Gen 37-50)? Well, Joseph had many brothers. His brothers were jealous of him because their father – Jacob – favoured him – gave him special treatment – even giving him a beautiful coat with different colours. Joseph also had the gift of interpreting dreams, and he would tell his brothers about dreams where they would bow down to him. This upset them because they felt he was making himself more important than them. They got tired of all of this and decided to teach him a lesson. So, they kidnapped him and sold him into slavery! And he ended up in Egypt, very far from his home and family. To hide what they did from their father, they pretended that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal. Goodness! Imagine

being kidnapped and sold by your very own family! This story shows us just how badly favouritism and jealousy can destroy families, and we need to guard against these things.

Years later, when he was in prison in Egypt, Joseph was asked to interpret a dream Pharaoh had. The dream warned of a famine that would last seven-years after a seven-year period of plenty. Pharaoh was happy with Joseph's interpretation and appointed him ruler over Egypt so that he could gather as much grain as possible to help the Egyptians prepare for the years of famine. When the famine happened, people were running out of food in Egypt and other areas, including Canaan where Joseph's family were from. Joseph's brothers came to Egypt looking for food, and they didn't even recognize him! This gave Joseph the opportunity to see if they were still jealous and mean, or if they changed over the years.

Joseph could have held onto his anger and hurt for what they did to him and taken revenge on his brothers – he could have paid them back for what they did to him - now that he was in a powerful position. He could have treated them as his enemies. Instead, today's reading tells us that Joseph chose to forgive them and even invited them to move to Egypt, where he could provide for them. He chose to treat them differently to the way they treated him.

This is what Jesus invites us to do when he says we should love our enemies and do good to those that hurt and abuse us. Jesus wants us to behave differently – to do things according to God's ways and not our own. And when we choose to follow him, we learn from him how to receive God's love, healing, and mercy. What we do should not be determined by what others do to us. Instead, what we do should be our response to the love, healing, and mercy God shows us. When we do things God's way, we learn about the nature of God, and we learn that God wants us to be like him and grow in his ways – taking on his nature. So, God calls us to share with others the mercy, love, forgiveness, grace that God gives us – even those who are being unfair or mean to us, like friends or family members who fight with us or don't speak to us. Or maybe we are the ones who fight with our friends and families, making them our enemies. Jesus wants us to learn from him and choose to behave differently – to say sorry – to seek and give forgiveness and to reconcile – make up - with one another.

This week I encourage you to practice kindness, forgiveness, generosity and grace. Try not to condemn and judge others. Instead, when you are faced with such situations –

when you are being hurt or when you want to hurt – I want you to stop and pray. Pray for the other person and ask God to help you respond and behave in a way that allows God to heal the hurt and bring good out of a bad or difficult situation. Just as he did for Joseph and his brothers.

Amen