

Gracious God, take our minds and think through them;
take our hands and work through them;
take our hearts and set them on fire.
Amen.

There is nothing we can do to make God love us more, and there is nothing we can do to make God love us less¹ – and because of this we are called to live by a different measure.

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Today we read the Beatitudes, Jesus' Sermon on the Plain in Luke's Gospel. Framed as a series of blessings and woes, it then moves into an explication of how to treat your enemies, before ending with the Golden Rule (treat others with the respect you would demand for yourself).

We have tamed the message of this profound scriptural proclamation to something like "be fair and be kind," when what it is really telling us is that if we are to follow Christ, then we have to do better – and it begins with loving our enemies.

Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who abuse you. Turn the other cheek. Give the shirt off your back. Give to those who ask and take alike. Expect nothing in return. Sounds ridiculous, right? Like someone with no boundaries or norms!

And yet in that lies the key to how we are called to live as disciples of Jesus – expect nothing in return.

¹ Philip Yancy

This is countercultural in a culture that is steeped in the idea of “fair exchange” and “return on investment.”

I’ll treat you well, but I expect the same in return. If you love me, I’ll love you. If you do good to me, I’ll do good to you in return. I’ll give to you now, if you give me later.²

In today’s Gospel, Jesus insists that when reduce our interactions with others to *quid quo pros*, then we reduce love, and kindness, and mercy to mere commodities. True love – the kind of love that God teaches – isn’t caught up in an exchange; it expects nothing in return.³

A love like that – love that is completely free and unbounded – is called grace.

We may think of grace primarily as the unmerited, saving love of God, but this is exactly the love Jesus called us to live out as people created in the image of God.⁴

Here’s my “I statement”: this is really hard – and not just for our enemies, but for everyone else too.

Loving one person unconditionally – let alone everyone – and not just loving that way, but then making that kind of love the center of how we live our whole lives – is very hard. You might even say impossible.

And yet, have you ever met someone who did that in some small way? Who listened so well that you not only felt heard, but seen? Who really showed up when you were in need? Who called you on your crap when you need that, and then offered wisdom (not just advice)? Who shined the light of Christ to dispel your fears?

² Salt Project Commentary for All Saints’ Day

³ Salt Project Commentary for All Saints’ Day

⁴ Salt Project Commentary for All Saints’ Day

We call people who give us glimpses of this grace-filled love “saints.” And whether living or departed, these saints show us that it’s possible to dip into the deep well of God’s love and extend it to others.

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Today we celebrate All Saints’ Day, remembering those who have come before us in faith who now make up the communion of saints. We are also capping of our stewardship program and will be gathering and blessing our pledges for the coming year.

These two things are connected in that it was those who came before us who made this community a place where we now find grace-filled love – and it will be us who give to sustain this community so that it will continue to be a beacon on the hill for all to see.

Whether today, or next week, or next month – I hope that you will make a pledge as a sign of love received and given. No gift is too big, and no gift is too small. More than one person has said to me recently that it is the act of pledging that is most important, which I completely believe to be true. Even if it’s just \$5, even if it’s just signing your name to say that you’re here and you’re committed to shining your light – that is enough.

There is nothing we can do to make God love us more, and there is nothing we can do to make God love us less. We are enough. And we just have to remember that, and then do our best every day to love without measure.

~ Amen ~