Text: Luke 6:27-38

**Introduction**

The gospel reading last week and this week are what the lectionary gives us from Luke’s version of the Sermon on the Mount. In Luke it’s sometimes snarkily called the Sermon on the Plain, because Luke records that Jesus, “came down with them and stood on a level place with a great crowd” and delivers the sermon. And last week you had the beatitudes, the blessings, but Luke also includes some comparable woes. I think what you have is simply the facts of being an itinerant preacher. As Jesus would walk from place to place with his disciples – preaching and healing – the preaching would be very similar but with minor changes or slightly different emphasis depending upon the people in the crowd. And where Matthew was a disciple present at all of them. Luke is compiling the story from witnesses. Still an inspired work. I don’t get out of listening to it saying that. But I find Luke’s version much harder.

It isn’t that we necessarily read it wrong. He says what he says and I think the plain meaning is there. Where we go wrong, and why I hate when I hear it quoted live, is that I don’t think we actually hear it. Or we don’t stop to process what it means.

**Text**

Let me start with the last bit that our lesson today gives us. Jesus gives a string of rhetorical gems. “Judge not, and you will not be judged…give, and it will be given to you.” That string ends with “the measure you use it will be measured back to you.” Now I think what most of us might hear from that is some version of Karma. What you put out into the universe comes back at you. But Karma is not a Christian doctrine. If you are looking for the cosmic scales to be balanced in this world, I’m sorry. Older Christians called it a vale of tears for a reason. You follow the man of sorrows acquainted with grief. And even the pagan who believes in Karma needs reincarnation to make the entire idea work. If Jesus is preaching karma, something is off.

Now we hear it as karma, if we are hearing it only as law. Law that I must go out and immediately keep. Judge not, and so we go out saying stupid things like “I really need to ignore that fact that this guy is a pornographer, killed someone, makes a living as a thief. It’s not mine to judge.” It might not be ours to execute judgement. Caesar bears the sword for that. But gross immorality is not what Jesus is talking about. That law is present to judge us all. And the law of God is good and wise. And the very first use of the law is the curb – to prevent sinful human from escalating hurt. Applying judgement that there are situations and people you want to avoid is wisdom.

The sermon doesn’t want us to reject the law. It wants us to feel the weight of the law on ourselves. If we think we can stand under the law be sure to look at yourself in the mirror clearly. And looking at ourselves clearly we might start to ask if there is any way we can escape the Karma reading. Because none of us want judgement given to us with good means, pressed down, shaken together, running over.

**Christology**

Jesus makes the logic that he is working with clear is a couple of assertions. “If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you?” And knowing that we might live in an age that doesn’t understand that word love. “If you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same.”

And this is absolutely true. Loving your family is expected. Now we might have trouble doing that. This is part of looking into the mirror rightly. Even sinners…Even terrible people… return good to good, typically. If all we are doing is acting in this world on the basis of Karma – or Karma avoidance – we are acting no differently that sinners. “Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount.” You can go down to the bank today and on the basis of your credit score get a loan.

Is this how we think the Most High God of the universe operates? Like a bank?

Do we think we have been given everything we see on this good earth – which we have – and has the Most High received back the same amount? Are we prepared for God the Bank Accountant?

The good news is that a Bank is a terrible metaphor for God. God has not done good just to those who have done good to him. God does not just give to those who can pay back. No, God gives to the just and the unjust alike. God has given to those who take and take, and to those who return in thanks. God is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. God loves his enemies.

For we have all been the enemies of God, the enemies of Christ. For me, that’s the simple definition of sin. We’ve broken the King’s peace. In many and various ways we’ve declared ourselves outlaws. Yet God continues to love us. We hate him, and he sends his son. We cast aspersions at him, and He prays for us. We betray him with a kiss, and he offers the other cheek. We put him on the cross and take away this mortal dress, throwing dice for his tunic. And he gives us the resurrection body. He clothes us anew.

“Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.”

**Moral**

The typical usage of the parts of this sermon that I hear are not calls to be merciful, but legal accusations back. You have not loved you enemies enough. You are the one who has a problem judging me for doing this thing we both know I shouldn’t be doing. This sermon was not given to be used as a shield from accountability to the law, nor as some type of mutually assured destruction game where we can all fall to the lowest rung.

The sermon was given that we might look in the mirror of the law and see how far short we personally fall. And it was given that we might understand the God we have. The God we have is merciful. The God we have’s measure runs over - “My cup runs over, sure goodness and mercy shall follow me.”

Of course we are expected to love those who love us. To do good to those who are near us. That is the expectation of the natural world. And to the extent that we fail in that, we’ve failed at being even sinners.

But God has shown us mercy. And in his mercy we might begin to be merciful. To forgive. To lend without expecting the return. And we can’t do that by the law. There is no Karma here. This is purely the work of the Spirit. It is done purely out of faith.

**Eschatological**

Because this world will not pay it back. This world will most likely punish you for doing good. No good deed goes unpunished. But Christ has promised that if we live this way, we are doing it to him. If we choose to live mercifully, the Father’s measure of mercy shall be ours.

“Love you enemies, do good, and lend expecting nothing in return…and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High.”

God works in this world through the means of his church…through you. It’s a tight line to walk. If you think God owes you something for these works, he doesn’t. But if you do them out of faith, you will get more than you can imagine.

God pays his debts. He pays them extravagantly. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over.

None of us want that in judgement. But the household of God does not live by the law. We live by grace. And the measure we use, will be applied to us.