



## **“You Want Me to Do What?!”**

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### **Scripture (NRSV):**

#### **Luke 6:17-28, 34-36**

<sup>17</sup> He came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. <sup>18</sup> They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. <sup>19</sup> And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.

<sup>20</sup> Then he looked up at his disciples and said:

“Blessed are you who are poor,  
for yours is the kingdom of God.

<sup>21</sup> “Blessed are you who are hungry now,  
for you will be filled.

“Blessed are you who weep now,  
for you will laugh.

<sup>22</sup> “Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. <sup>23</sup> Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.

<sup>24</sup> “But woe to you who are rich,  
for you have received your consolation.

<sup>25</sup> “Woe to you who are full now,  
for you will be hungry.

“Woe to you who are laughing now,  
for you will mourn and weep.

<sup>26</sup> “Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.

<sup>27</sup> “But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, <sup>28</sup> bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.

<sup>32</sup> “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. <sup>33</sup> If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. <sup>34</sup> If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. <sup>35</sup> But love your enemies, do good, and lend, despairing of no one. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for God is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. <sup>36</sup> Be merciful, just as your Heavenly Parent is merciful.

### **Sermon:**

Two years ago I went camping in Texas, with my daughter, my son in law, and my little granddaughter. We went first to the mountains of west Texas for a few nights of stargazing at the McDonald Observatory, and then south, close to the Mexican border, to a state park called Seminole Canyon.

Seminole Canyon is famous for its petroglyphs. So, the baby was put in her baby backpack on Taylor’s shoulders and we went on the carefully guided tour down in the canyon.

No one is allowed down there without a guide, it is still a canyon that can suddenly be swept by flash floods from the weather in the mountains that we saw in the distance.

And, the petroglyphs are very beautiful, very detailed, ancient and precious. The guides want to make sure that no one will scratch, or cut, or desecrate them in any way. They are knowledgeable and bossy!

We came around a corner of heavy brush and climbed up some wooden stairs to a platform that held us as we looked up and up and up, at a most remarkable petroglyph. It was at least 25 feet tall, a human form, painted on the curve of a shallow cave wall, in bright red and black against the muted tan of the walls. Our guide told us that the archeologists and anthropologists had found ample evidence that the people of this area often camped here, with bright fires burning below this giant figure. Plenty of fire ash and food scraps had been found at this specific spot.

The guide proceeded to tell us that this figure, leaping and moving in the light of an evening fire, would have looked even more imposing, and would have been seen for miles around.

She then said, “it would have scared other marauding people away, giving off the message for people to see miles around, ‘don’t mess with us.’”

Everyone nodded their heads, and the baby was fussing in her backpack, so we all moved on.

But, I was bugged. And I have remain bugged by that assumption of our guide, ever since. Because I saw that day, and I continue to believe it is still possible, that the message of the giant human in red and black might NOT be the message the guide supposed.

Seen from miles away, in the dark of the night, that giant human figure, glowing in firelight, might have been something else entirely; it might have been a giant welcome mat.

A giant “Hotel 6” sign for the ancient people of that land!

Friends, the presumption of our own wretchedness, the evidence taken from our own lives, the evidence of cruelty and greed seen in our land these days, make us feel that human wickedness is inevitable.

Human violence, and the darkness of selfishness and greed, are inevitable.

Depravity is ingrained in us, deeply and irrevocably. Thomas Hobbes, St. Augustine and so many other thinkers have convinced us of this, and hold sway in our cultural messaging.

We are fearsome creatures, we must protect ourselves from each other.

But what if that is not true?

What if that is not the arc of human evolution?

God bless ‘em, archeologists, and anthropologists and sociologists do research based on opening up to new ideas, new questions, other possible paths of inquiry when asking about the human family and our human past. (check the research at The Greater Good Science Center, at Berkeley, CA)

Sure, we know and recite our 5-10,000 year story of our “western” civilization with its animal husbandry, and farming, and cities, and wars of conquest; its ages of flint, and bronze and iron. Yes, THAT is the story we tell. The story of human violence.

From the Fertile Crescent along the Euphrates and the Tigris Rivers...down through the Babylonians, the Egyptians, the Greeks, the Romans, the kingdoms of Europe, the capitalist empires of today...we tell a story of violence.

But that is not the only story we can tell.

We are so embedded in the story of human violence and domination that we miss all the signs, in the archeological evidence, and in the world of many cultures different than our own, and yes, even in our own lives.

Yet it is there.

And it is here, in the teaching of Jesus. (And in the teaching of just about every other major world religion, dating back 5-10,000 years. The teaching of the way of human potential to realize peace.)

This teaching says: We are meant to live at peace with one another.

We are meant to forgive each other. Share with one another. Walk the mile, or two or three with another.

We are not hard-wired to steal, to rape, to murder one another.

We are created to share. To love, to forgive. To be in community. To care.

To look at someone who has wronged us, and work to be in harmony and at peace once again, restored to right relationship.

How can this be?

Well, we can listen to the stories of other cultures, whether they are the indigenous peoples of the America's, or the people of Australia or African societies. Stories of cultures and communities that worked hard to live in peaceful cooperation because everyone's life depended on it, depended on their working together against the uncertainties of life. Lives that were not founded on warfare and conquest, or acquisition...lives built around community and children, around the plants and the animals and the people and their curiosity, their art, their love and laughter.

Jesus' teaching today is hard. Very hard. We are not sure who we are in the lists of blessings and woes.

We are not at all sure that forgiving an enemy is possible. It doesn't make sense, in the story we tell of "how it is in the world".

Our hurts are too deep. Our anger keeps us alive. Our woes keep us fighting.

Our money and stuff is so precious to us, and we aren't sure there is enough for others, so we protect what is ours.

This is the story we are embedded in, so deeply we believe it, sometimes utterly. It is the way it is.

Unless, it is not! Jesus is a scary teacher because, embedded as he was in his own world; a world ruled by fear and shame, sickness and death, oppression and cruelty...he declares that is not the way it is supposed to be.

When he tells us to love our enemy, when he tells us to be merciful, generous, and “despairing of no one”, when he tells us to be as merciful as our heavenly parent is merciful, (for God is kind to the unmerciful and the wicked) then he is showing us a different way of being in the world, he wants to tell a different story of who we are and what it means to be human.

And Jesus says, “begin here, begin with yourself, with the community of now.”

Jesus calls this entering “the Kingdom of God”. And he began with an alternative view of the world, of humankind, and even, an alternative view of God. A God of love and generosity, creativity and joy, rather than a god of vengeance and war.

Jesus’ teaching tears apart the world we think we know so well! The world we feel trapped in, buried in, living and dying in.

Jesus had a bigger vision.

Building up another way of being in the world.

Building up another way TO BE THE WORLD.

To be human.

Theologian and scientist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, wrote, early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that the purpose of the evolution of life on Earth was to evolve into a state of constant loving awareness, and in that state, to become one with the Creator of all things, who is Love Eternal and Love forever fruitful, and in which dwell unimagined possibilities for more life. He was considered a heretic. Not surprisingly, really.

But, really, it is not just theologians and social scientists who have reminded me that we can look deeper, and further, than our bias and entrenched cultural understanding.

I have been reminded by watching Star Trek *Discovery* these days, as one of their science officers tells the others; “energy cannot be created or destroyed in an isolated system”. This is known as the First Law of Thermodynamics, or the Law of Conservation of Energy.

Energy is energy, and it doesn't fall into nothingness, *it changes form*. We are forms of energy.

I hope I am not confusing you here; but the very radical nature of the teaching of Jesus this morning, clearly upholds a different way of understanding the world. He challenges us with A CHANGE IN FORM of the energy that is humanity.

Our world will not be annihilated into nothing...it is one with the energy of all things.

But its state CAN BE CHANGED. There is the option always, for new and creative manifestations of energy.

The forms of human life can be altered.

The story of human interaction can be a different story.

The very fact that the first thing the human eye can identify in a human face, at a great distance, is the human smile...this simple fact tells me something about all of us. (*see the book, Born to be Good, by Dacher Keltner*)

We want to like each other.

We want to trust each other.

We can live at peace with one another.

We need each other, to be fully human.

Our humanity is vital and moving, evolving and changing.

We can evolve for the good.

It may very well be, that the giant human form, in red and black, painted on that cave wall, was a door flung open, a hand held out, a hug extended, a signpost; of the Kingdom of God. Alleluia!