



## Luke 6:27–28

27 'But to you who are listening I say: love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who ill-treat you.

### Reflection

Today's passage comes from Luke 6:27–28. We're in the middle of Jesus' 'Sermon on the Level Place', Luke's precursor to Jesus' later Sermon on the Mount, in which

Jesus levels with his disciples (and us) about the true nature of following him. So far, it's been confronting to say the least. Radically countercultural. Today, perhaps more so than ever. You'll see what I mean as I read today's passage for us now,

27 'But to you who are listening I say: love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who ill-treat you.

Jesus is speaking to his disciples. He's teaching them about the cost of discipleship and the true nature of what it means to be a member of the kingdom of the God. So far the picture Jesus has painted has been one of a hard life – poverty, hunger, mourning, hatred and persecu-

tion. And somehow, amidst all this, today, Jesus tells them and us to,

love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who ill-treat you.

What kind of radical love must it take amidst poverty, hunger, mourning, hatred and persecution to genuinely love our enemies? And have that love overflow in doing good to those who hate us, in blessing those who curse us, in regularly praying and interceding with God for those who continue to treat us badly. What kind of radical love is this?

The answer is that this is God's love in us, overtaking us, by the power of his Holy

Spirit. God loves his enemies, even those who have turned their backs on him. We see this in his common grace (his benevolence to all) in which he provides sunshine and rain indiscriminately to all people of the earth. Other examples of his common grace might include: the joy and happiness people experience in bringing children into the world, the universal satisfaction of a job well done, the companionship of close relationships, the pleasures of food and other sensory experiences. Also the way God holds back sin and evil having placed a sense of justice in our hearts and judicial systems over us through the government of the land. In his common grace God demonstrates his love for everyone; even for those who ignore him, even for those who openly hate him. He does all this because of the dignity and worth of

every human being. We are made in his image and he is our Creator which gives every human life inestimable worth. But God also showers down many blessings on his enemies in the hope that they might wake up to him, and turn and repent of their sins. 2 Peter 3:9 says that God doesn't want anyone to perish and so through his common grace and his patience he wants everyone to come to repentance. And his offer of saving grace, through the death and resurrection of Jesus, is open to all.

The Bible says that God is love (1 John 4:8). And of course the greatest expression of God's love is Jesus. The Bible says in Leviticus 19 that we are to love our neighbours as ourselves. But what if our neighbour is our enemy? Jesus taught us that this commandment extends even to our enemies.

Jesus points us to the way God loves his enemies as the model for the way we are to love our enemies. Jesus wept over Jerusalem, the City that murdered the prophets and would murder him. On the cross, dying an excruciating death at the hands of Roman soldiers, who were dividing up his garments just below him, Jesus prays for their forgiveness, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.' (Luke 23:34). In John 13:34 Jesus says, 'A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.' Jesus loved us so much that he died for us while we were still his enemies, and today he is teaching us to love as he loved, to love as God loves,

love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who

curse you, pray for those who ill-treat you.

In Greek there are four different words for love. The word used here is by far the strongest. It is deliberate love, rooted in the will and not in the merit of the object of that love. It is a deep, continuous, growing and ever-renewing activity of the will superintended by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is a supernatural love, God's love in us giving us the power to love as he loves, even to the point of genuinely loving our enemies and laying down our lives for them as Jesus did for us.

Corrie Ten Boom was a Dutch Christian who resisted the Nazis and hid Jews in her home. Towards the end of the war, she and her sister were arrested, and sent to

a concentration camp. After the war, Ten Boom toured Europe, preaching a gospel of love and forgiveness. Her experience is a remarkable one, but by the power of the Holy Spirit and the grace of God it is one we can imitate. Her words,

It was in a church in Munich that I saw him, a balding heavy-set man in a gray overcoat, a brown felt hat clutched between his hands.

One moment I saw the overcoat and the brown hat; the next, a blue uniform and a visored cap with its skull and crossbones. It came back with a rush: the huge room with its harsh overhead lights, the pathetic pile of dresses and shoes in the center of the floor, the shame of walking na-



ked past this man. I could see my sister's frail form ahead of me, ribs sharp beneath the parchment skin. Betsie, how thin you were!

This man had been a guard at Ravensbruck concentration camp.

“You mentioned Ravensbruck in your talk,” he was saying. “I was a guard in there.” No, he did not remember me.

“But since that time,” he went on, “I have become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from your lips as well. Fraulein, ...” his hand came out, ... “will you forgive me?”

And I stood there — I whose sins had every day to be forgiven — and could not. Betsie had died in that place — could he erase her slow terrible death simply for the asking?

It could not have been many seconds that he stood there, hand held out, but to me it seemed hours as I wrestled with the most difficult thing I had ever had to do.

I stood there with coldness clutching my heart. But forgiveness is not an emotion — I knew that. Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the heart's temperature.

“Jesus, help me!” I prayed silently. “I

can lift my hand, I can do that much. You supply the feeling.”

And so woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes.

“I forgive you, brother!” I cried. “With all my heart!”

For a long moment we grasped each other’s hands, the former guard and the former prisoner. I had never known God’s love so intensely as I did then.

God's love in us, overtaking us, by the power of the Holy Spirit. The kind of love that enables us to

love [our] enemies, do good to those who hate [us], 28 bless those who curse [us], pray for those who ill-treat [us]

## **Think & Pray**

Who is your enemy? Spend a few moments calling their faces to mind this morning. Who is it you're not on speaking terms with? Who is it at work that you can't stand? Who would you cross the street to avoid or pretend not to notice at the shops, averting your eyes. Who is it in your past that has hurt you deeply? Who currently hates

you, curses you, ill-treats you?

Can you love them? What would it take for you to love them? Open yourself up to the Holy Spirit this morning. Pray that God's love would fill you, and perhaps see if you can start praying for them.