

Sermon Matthew 5 38 48 7th S af Ep

Sermon: 7th Sunday after Epiphany

Text: Matthew 5:38-48

Theme: Love your enemies

Goal: To live as children of our heavenly Father: A life of love!

Dear Friends,

Introduction: Do you have or had an enemy? Maybe a personal enemy that you hate? What do you do to manage such a situation? Doesn't it eat away your heart? Sometimes the other person doesn't know that we hate him/her; and we are suffering a lot because of that situation. Our human nature cries for revenge for "eye for eye".

But Jesus turns over our natural feeling and proposes a radical change in our way of life: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." And He gives the reason for such a big change: "That you may be sons of your heavenly Father." We have a new status in our lives; we are living a new reality as children of God, who gives us the best example to follow. "We love because He first loved us", says John in his 1st letter (1 John 4:19).

I – The love of the Creator

Jesus points first to the daily experience of every human to show the love of God to all. Jesus argues: "God causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." The Christians don't have a special privilege when we talk about the natural resources of our world. The sun and the rain come over all, and we enjoy or suffer the climate like any other person.

Martin Luther explained the 4th Petition of the Lord's Prayer in this way: *"Give us this day our daily bread. - What does this mean? - God certainly gives daily bread to everyone without our prayers, even to all evil people, but we pray in this petition that God would lead us to realize this and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving."*

II – The love of the Redeemer

But God doesn't want to give us the daily bread only. He wants to give salvation to the whole humankind. He wants to rescue all from the condemnation of the darkness and bring all to His kingdom of light and life. And we have here the biggest example of God's love to all, and not just to the godly people, because in His eyes “there is no one righteous, not even one!” (Romans 3:10). We are all evil by nature.

We studied Romans 5 in our Bible Study Group. The apostle Paul is very clear in this chapter that we all used to be enemies of God, condemned people, ungodly people. And in that situation, God loved us so much that He sent His one and only begotten Son to die for us. Paul argues: “For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through His life!” (Romans 5:10).

The apostle John writes in his 1st letter (4:7-12,19-21): “Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another... Whoever claims to love God yet hates his brother is a liar. For whoever does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love his brother.”

To show how difficult it is to follow this commandment, we can remember the story of Peter when Jesus was betrayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. When Jesus was to be arrested by the soldiers, Peter took his sword and “struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear. But Jesus said: No more of this! And he touched the man's ear and healed him.” (Luke 22:50,51). - We would have the same reaction as Peter, of course! But Jesus showed how we are expected to handle such a situation; and He healed the man. -As far as we know, this was the last physical healing that Jesus performed, and just to an enemy! The name of that servant is mentioned by John (18:10): Malchus. This means, according to several biblical

interpretations, that Malchus was known by the first Christian Church and eventually became a Christian. He was not only touched by Jesus' hand to heal him, but he was touched by Jesus' love to convert him.

After this, when Jesus was nailed on the cross, He prayed for His enemies: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”(Luke 23:34). And Jesus' prayer was answered by God: “When the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard His cry and saw how he died, he said, Surely this man was the Son of God!” (Mark 15:39). This is understood that he recognized that Jesus was the Son of God and believed in Him.

Another story that helps us to understand the love to the enemies is the story of the Good Samaritan. Jews and Samaritans were enemies for a long time. When Jesus was asked about 'who is my neighbor whom I shall love', Jesus told that story. The church representatives, the priest and the Levite, didn't help the man that fell in the hand of the robbers and was lying down on the road. But one Samaritan, which means an enemy, who was passing on the same way, helped the needy man. (Luke 10:25-37).

III - “Loved by God – Love others!”

The motto of our St. Thomas Congregation is: *“Loved by God – love others!”* The love of God is very clear to us in the Bible. But who are the others? - This is a similar question to that of Jesus when He told the story of the Good Samaritan. And this question was raised at our last Bible Study as well. Who shall I help?

Looking to the teaching of Jesus in our Gospel, we shall help even our enemies. As God causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, we shall share what we have with the others. - But there are so many people asking for money on the roads and knocking at our door... Shall we help all of them? - This is really a difficult question; because we know that we are helping some of them to buy alcohol or drugs as we give them money. To give food? Sometimes they accept food, sometimes they don't accept it and want money. Our heart will decide to whom and when to give some food or a bottle of cold water. - Maybe the best is to help through Luther's Loot, bringing food and other goods to the church. This will be distributed to really needy people by some people in charge of that work. Or to help through an entity: Red Cross

or other similar organizations. – One thing must be very clear: We cannot be selfish and keep only for ourselves what we receive from God free.

“The others” need not only food or money, but they need love. The same love that God gives us is to be shared with others. This happens when we take time to visit someone sick; when we share the Gospel with someone; when we invite someone to come to the church or to the Bible Study; when we set a good example of life to our family, to our neighbors, to our colleagues in the school or in our job. As we cannot take care of millions of other people, let us love one by one, beginning with where we are and reaching even our enemies with the love of God. Is it difficult to go and reconcile with them? Begin to pray for them and God will open doors to reconciliation.

Conclusion:

We are not alone in our struggles about love. Paul wrote to the Romans (12:17-21): “Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord. On the contrary: “If your enemy is hungry, fed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” This last verse is our Watchword for 2011:

“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

When Jesus was teaching about forgiveness, the disciples said to the Lord: “Lord, increase our faith.” (Luke 17:5) This is our prayer as well. God called us to be His children and he gives us strength in His Word and His Sacrament to live a life of love to all, even to our enemies, as He loves us in Christ. Amen.

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