

**Sermon Notes – February 23, 2025**  
**The Holy Gospel of St. Luke 6: 27-38**  
**Peace Lutheran Church**  
**“Wrapping Our Arms Around Mercy!”**

This week's gospel continues with Jesus' teaching in the section of Luke's gospel that has been labeled the Sermon on the Plain, from which the beatitudes of last week were also drawn. It is only after assuring His audience of God's blessings, even when people hate and exclude them (Luke 6: 22), that Jesus proceeds to exhort his followers to return such hate with love (vv. 27, 35). The purpose is not to seek out suffering or to glory in it, but rather to recognize and model God's gracious presence in all of life, regardless of material circumstances.

Joseph models such graciousness in his response to his brothers. Although these same brothers threw him into a well and sold him into slavery (Gen. 37: 18-36), Joseph returns their curse with a blessing (45: 3-15). The commandment to such mercy and magnanimous is not an innovation of Jesus, but rather is rooted at the core of Hebrew Scripture in the narrative of models of faith such as Joseph in God's command to love your neighbor (Leviticus 19: 17-18), from which Jesus, Himself a faithful Jew, draws His teaching.

Perhaps, with such mercy, the psalmist's prayer that “the wicked shall be no more” (Ps. 37: 10) may be answered not by cutting off a segment of God's children, as the psalmist imagines Ps. #7: 9), but rather by a transformation of heart. Genesis recounts such a transformation among Joseph's brothers, who show mercy to Benjamin (44: 10-34) and receive Joseph's forgiveness with penitence.

However, Jesus is clear that such penitence or transformation must not be the goal of gracious living. We are called to live in love and service because such is the nature of our God. Such love, like the love of His God-self, must have no strings attached. So Jesus exhorts, “Do good and lend, expecting nothing in return” (Luke 6: 35). Here it is important to resist the temptation of a prosperity gospel that contorts this commandment to expect nothing from human beings but to feel entitled to a bounteous return from God the Father.

As we've seen in Genesis and in the blessings and woes of last week, God has human well-being in the present in mind. How He will act is not for humans to assume. On a different note, Paul makes this point in defending the resurrection of the body (1 Cor. 15: 35-50) - God acts according to His design and not ours!