

KTKW!
Luke 6:27-38

During the summer of 1778, a British battleship dropped anchor in the harbor of Nantucket Island, off the New England coast. William Rotch, a leader of the Quaker community on the island, knew that the ship's purpose was to plunder the town. With the consent of his fellow citizens, Rotch formed a one-man welcoming committee, and greeted Sir Conway-Etherege, the British commander, at the pier. He invited Conway-Etherege home to dinner. After a pleasant meal, the commander decided to get on with his business. "We're here to plunder," he told Rotch. "As you can see, your little hamlet is completely at our mercy. Where shall we start?" "I don't know of a better place than here at my house," said Rotch. "I'm better able to bear the loss than anyone else. We have some silver plate, some good, serviceable blankets, and food supplies in the cellar." Conway-Etherege didn't know what to do. He had never come across this response before! "Tell me," he said, "are there any more men like you on Nantucket?" "Oh, yes, many better men," said Rotch. "Well, I want to meet them," Conway-Etherege answered. So Rotch took him around to meet a shopkeeper who had given 400 barrels of flour to the poor the winter before, and another one who had given away blankets and shoes. "Would you like to meet more of our people?" asked Rotch. "Oh, no," replied Conway-Etherege. "I can hardly believe there are three such men as you in the world. A whole street full of them would be too much." So Conway-Etherege went back to this ship, and Nantucket was saved.

From Anglican Priest, N.T. Wright – “the kingdom that Jesus preached and lived was all about a glorious, uproarious, absurd generosity. Think of the best you can do for the worst person and go ahead and do it. Think of what you would really like someone to do for you and do it for them. Think of the people to whom you are tempted to be nasty and lavish generosity on them instead. Theologian Wright’s suggestions have a fresh spring like quality. They are all about new life bursting out energetically, like flowers growing through concrete and startling everyone with their color and vigor.

How many people do you know who actually successfully live in this manner? My guess, since I have not performed the research, is that most everyone at some point manages to do at least one of these three suggestions. How can this become more the norm than the exception? Jesus did not provide his followers with a new list of proper behavior for the kingdom of God, rather he sought to transform our hearts and give us a lightness of spirit in the face of all the world can throw at us. And the bottom line of living in this manner is that this is what God is like! God is generous to all people; generous to a fault. God provides good things for all to enjoy, the undeserving as well as the deserving. What is that phrase somewhere in the Bible that talks about the rain falling on the just and the unjust? For an impromptu Bible drill – anyone? It is Matthew 5:45 – part of the Sermon on the Mount: *In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike.* (NLT)

Another characteristic of our God is that He is astonishingly merciful – think about it – can anyone who has a clear understanding of what goes on in their own hearts – all that muck and mire yet still experiences God’s grace and love – disagree with this? How can we, as forgiven children of God be any less? And, once we recognize this true nature of God – then you and I stand a chance of making this way of life our own.

Listen again to the first two verses of our reading from the Gospel of Luke; *...for those of you who are listening: love your enemies! Do good to people who hate you! Bless people who curse you! Pray for people who treat you badly!* In other words, KTWK!! I learned decades ago that the old English proverb is true – one can catch more flies with honey than vinegar! KTWK – Kill Them With Kindness. When someone is behaving badly the very best thing you and I can do is to love them, bless them and pray for them. Kill them with kindness. The literal understanding of this phrase is to cause discomfort to someone by treating him or her in a way that is extremely kind or helpful Instead of returning the insult. Love your enemies.

Do good to people who hate you! Bless people who curse you! The following illustration is a perfect example: “I started to cry immediately. And I looked at him, and I said, ‘Ron, if I spent every second of every minute of every hour for the rest of my life telling you how sorry I am, it wouldn’t come close to how my heart feels. I’m so sorry.’” The speaker is Jennifer Thompson-Cannino, who had given eyewitness testimony that put Ronald Cotton behind bars for 11 years for raping her at knife-point. He was later exonerated by DNA evidence. Jennifer is describing their first meeting after Cotton’s release from prison. “And Ronald just leaned down, he took my hands ... and he looked at me, he said, ‘I forgive you.’” Here’s Cotton’s take on that dramatic moment: “I told her, I said, ‘Jennifer, I forgive you. I don’t want you to look over your shoulder. I just want us to be happy and move on in life.’” “The minute he forgave me,” Jennifer continued, “it’s like my heart physically started to heal. And I thought, ‘This is what grace and mercy is all about. This is what they teach you in church that none of us ever get.’ And here was this man that I had hated. I mean, I used to pray every day of my life during those 11 years that he would die. That he would be raped in prison and someone would kill him in prison. That was my prayer to God. And here was this man who with grace and mercy just forgave me. How wrong I was, and how good he is.”

Pray for those people who treat you badly – I learned a powerful lesson following this piece of advice when I least wanted to. You have heard me speak of, “the mother of my children,” AKA Vern’s former wife. Over the years we have grown close, we are family, and she is a sister of another mother to me. But it wasn’t always this way. Early on in our marriage there was tension and friction between the two of us. At the time I was working in a Quilt Shop owned by a dear friend. Every day, it seemed, I had a new grievance to air with Mary about the kids’ mom. This had been going on for some time and one morning after I vented to her, Mary calmly looked at me and asked, “Are you praying for her?” I gave a knee jerk response, “Are you out of your mind? Why would I ever want to do that?” Mary quietly suggested that this would be the mature Christian thing to do. For several days, I choked on Mary’s words. And the more I choked, the harder it became to ignore her counsel. Finally, I said to God, “All right, I will pray

for her! But I don't have to like it!" I cannot tell you enough how God used my reluctant prayers. First of all, I quickly learned it is hard to stay angry with someone for whom you pray. At first the changes were subtle. As I was able to let go of my anger, resentment and hurt, she started becoming healthier. She went to college to become an RN, eventually getting her Masters. Some years after getting remarried (I officiated at their wedding), she and her husband moved to Virginia. This past January she celebrated her 30th year of sobriety. When I say we are family, we are. We celebrate all the holidays together, go out for dinner from time to time, and this past year, she organized my family birthday party. She is loving, loyal and would give me the shirt off her back. Pray for those who treat you badly.

Back to this 'laundry list' from Jesus. Verse 29ff. *If someone hits you on the cheek – offer him the other one! If someone takes away your coat – don't stop them taking your shirt! Give to everyone who asks you and don't ask for things back when people have taken them. Whatever you want people to do to you, do that to them. Don't judge and you won't be judge. Forgive and you will be forgiven.* How are we doing, church? If we are going to be honest with ourselves, we must admit with shame that large sections of Christianity down the years seem to have known little or nothing of the God Jesus was talking about. (Wright, 74). Much that has called upon the name of Jesus seems to have believed instead of a gloomy God, a penny-pinching God, a God who only concern is to make life difficult and salvation nearly impossible. I do not understand this God, nor do I understand many of my fellow brother and sister Christians.

Let's try a little experiment. Close your eyes and empty your mind of every other thought. Okay, now, picture God. You can open your eyes now. What was the first image that came to mind? I'll bet, for most of us, it was an old man with a white beard (despite what the Westminster Shorter Catechism teaches about God being "a spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable" -- and therefore, neither male nor female).

Now let me ask you this. In your mental image, was God smiling? My guess is, you pictured God without a smile. "Stern" might be a good word to describe the visage of the Almighty.

Now, one further question: in your mind's eye, was God holding anything? If you answered, "a thunderbolt," congratulations -- you've just selected most people's all-time favorite accessory to the divine wardrobe.

Why is it so many of us picture the Lord of heaven and earth as a grumpy old man packing a loaded thunderbolt? We imagine God that way, even though we know better. Sure, God can get angry. There's ample evidence of that in the Bible. Yet the Bible also teaches that "God is love" -- and that God "so loved the world" that we have received as a gift "God's only son," that we might "not perish, but have everlasting life." Why is it, then, that we so quickly forget these passages, and elevate to such high prominence those dealing with God's wrath and destruction?

What even makes me sadder, though, is the forbidding reputations so many Christians seem to have. So many of my extended family keep any faith conversations at arm's length. They have

had such negative encounters with what I refer to as militant Christians who favor the loaded thunder bolt image of God that we are not able to delve deeply into matters of faith which saddens me. Yet, I also understand their hesitation. Going back to Wright's comment that we must admit with shame that large sections of Christianity down the years seem to have known little or nothing of the God Jesus was talking about.

First, I'm not a fan of saying who is or who is not a Christian -- it's a big religion with lots of different expressions, and I'm the last person qualified to be a gatekeeper of who is allowed to use the term. Secondly, some have suggested we stop using the term altogether, which I'm not a fan of either. "Christian" is a beautiful term from our early days of a faith tradition, and you're not going to see my name on the list of people who think we just dump it.

However, I do think the term "Jesus follower" is a more helpful term to interject into the conversation. While "Christian" can mean a million different things, "Jesus follower" is a little more definable because, by definition, this would be an individual who is living a life that follows the example we find in Jesus. I'm proud to be a Christian, but I long to be a Jesus follower. It's what I strive for. It's what I want to be when I grow up. It's what this movement was all about.

While it's not always easy to tell who is or is not a Christian, I think a Jesus follower is observable. One doesn't need to tell you they're a Jesus follower, because you'll be able to see by how they live, whether or not it's true. As I look at the Jesus I find in the New Testament, I think there are a few hallmarks of what it looks like to follow him -- traits that can be observed to "spot a Jesus follower":

1. A Jesus follower likes to talk about him but does it in such a way that it causes you to want to know more, not less.
2. A Jesus follower embraces enemy love.
3. A Jesus follower is the one who is full of compassion for outsiders and the weak.
4. A Jesus follower is the one who is quickest to show others mercy.
5. A Jesus follower is the one who, when they describe what God is like, describes Jesus.

This my friends is a good start to treating others with kindness. True followers of Jesus will know well how to KTWK. If we lived in a society where everyone believed in this kind of God, there would not be any violence, there wouldn't be any revenge, there wouldn't be any division of class or caste. Seriously if even a few people around you took Jesus seriously and lived like this, life would be exuberant, different, and astonishing. People would stare and fall all over themselves to learn more about this Jesus and his followers. This is indeed worth pondering. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.