

# Sitting in the Gap Study Guide – February 24, 2019

## Luke 6:27-38

(Click on scripture above to link directly to each passage in the *NRSV* on biblegateway.com.)

### Suggested Study / Prep

1. Read the passage(s) in several different translations and/or paraphrases (e.g. *NRSV* and *The Message*)
2. Read the provided commentary(s) below
3. Visit and explore some of the additional resources links (and/or explore your own commentaries, resources, etc)
4. Reflect on the provided questions
5. Generate your own questions and “wonderings”

### Commentary on Luke 6:27-38 (From *Homiletics*; “And Again I Say...Amen!”, February 19, 1995)

In Luke, Jesus goes to the mountains for prayer, reflection, refreshment, rejuvenation. It is while enjoying one of these mountaintop moments that Jesus singled out 12 apostles from among his many disciples. Immediately after this, Jesus leads his newly appointed apostles back down the mountain to "a level place," a place where apostles, disciples and a crowd of eager people stand shoulder to shoulder. The level place accords them all equal footing, just as they are all equally in need of Jesus' message.

Although this week's gospel lesson does not include Luke's version of the "blessings and woes" (vv.20-26), their distinct Lukan structure carries into the texts we do read. Unlike Matthew's version of these sayings, rightly called the "Beatitudes" because only blessings are listed, Luke creates a careful symmetry in his text. Four "blessings" are pronounced, followed by four parallel "woes": poor-rich/hungry-full/weeping-laughing/rejected-accepted. Luke's balanced structure is reminiscent of the evenhandedness of the blessing-curse announced to the Israelites in Deuteronomy 11:26-28.

Now in verse 27, another four-part saying is offered by Jesus. But unlike the blessings and woes, these sayings make up an active command from Jesus. When Jesus declares to his audience, "Love your enemies," this is just the beginning formulation of a general principle \_ a principle that is immediately made specific and active. The "love" Jesus calls for is not an emotional or sentimental attachment. This love is actively oriented \_ it is "love" only because it is actively pursuing good for the enemy. "Do good," Jesus commands. He doesn't say "think good thoughts or have good feelings," but actually "do good to those who hate you." Just as there were four blessings and four woes above, verses 27-28 detail another four-way command: love the enemy; do good; bless; pray for. Calling his listeners to bless and pray for the enemy is an even more difficult task. Blessing and praying are motivated from the inside, not simply outside. Cosmetic "goodness" is easier to fake than a banal blessing.

While the "abuse" Jesus refers to in verse 28 can be interpreted as physical abuse because it follows closely on the heels of the reference about those who "curse you," most translators suggest that verbal abuse \_ insults, ridicule, name-calling \_ is intended. Verse 29 clearly focuses on an example of physical abuse that is also highly insulting. An openhanded strike on the cheek was a sign of challenge, a signal that the aggressor was ready for a real fight. To respond by offering "the other also" would be as unexpected as it would be difficult. The implication of turning the other cheek also suggests that the aggressor, the enemy, will now use his other hand to strike out. This second blow, then, is even more insulting than the first. If it is given with the left hand \_ the hand reserved for toilet duties \_

it is unclean as well as humiliating.

Taken together, verses 29-30 provide actual examples of how Jesus' mandate to love the enemy may be expressed. Love in action means turning the other cheek. It means allowing not only your best garment, your coat, to be taken wrongfully from you, but everything else \_ your cheaper inner garment ("shirt") \_ to be taken as well.

In these example texts, the second person pronoun changes from being plural in verses 27-28 to singular in verses 29-30. It reverts back to plural again in verse 31. These changes suggest Luke is combining sources here in order to expand the specificity of the general principle Jesus is teaching. Luke's text makes these difficult responses very direct and very personal: you turn your cheek; you give up your coat and shirt; you give to beggars; you don't expect the return of your goods or recompense for their loss.

After these personal directives, Luke shifts back to the plural form as he cites here the Golden Rule \_ which is almost certainly a saying inserted from elsewhere. The universality of this "rule," however, fits so well with the personal nature of the preceding text that apparently Luke couldn't resist placing it here. In Matthew's rendition of this sermon, this text appears much later (Matthew 7:12), not in the midst of these rules for personal conduct. This "rule" is designated as something from "the law and the prophets" in Matthew's text \_ in other words, this is a mandate about correct behavior from God, not from human beings. By tying the "rule" into the string of insults and injustices the obedient may be forced to suffer, Luke's text suggests that our behavior should be governed according to God's principles \_ not the retaliatory, revengeful, retributory instincts of human beings.

Working against normal human responses is taken to even greater heights as Luke continues his text in verses 31-36. Here, loving the enemy is taken far beyond the mere reciprocal ethic that governs most people's lives. Just as the aggressive, abusive behavior of "enemies" should not be allowed to shape your behavior towards them, neither should the loving, respectful behavior of your friends influence your actions. Regardless of an individual's status \_ friend or foe \_ that person should receive the same treatment from your hands and heart. Luke gives three examples (Matthew 5:46-47 gives only two) of how offering love, goodness or even services (lending) to those who reciprocate in kind is easy \_ something "even sinners" can do.

Verse 35 encapsulates the higher vision that God is calling us all to embody. This mandate goes even beyond the Golden Rule \_ a "rule," by the way, which can be found in ancient Babylonian texts and in the writings of the Greek scholars, as well as in Jewish and Christian writings. The Golden Rule's "as you would have them do to you" implies eventual reciprocity \_ be nice to the enemy long enough, and the enemy will become a friend. But verse 35 repeats Jesus' initial order to "love your enemies" and now adds on the disappointing "expecting nothing." There is, however, an explanation of sorts for why this loving behavior should be carried out. Jesus is urging his listeners to be like God, to be "children of the Most High." For God's own mysterious reasons, God is "kind to the ungrateful and the wicked." Jesus does not try to give any rationale for this divine eccentricity \_ God is God, and God will do what God will do. Jesus calls his listeners to imitate God's penchant for meting out unmerited mercies and love.

Luke follows this mandate with the "judge not" commands in verses 37-38. This order probably is older than the scattering of these texts that Matthew provides (Matthew 7:1-5; 15:14; 10:24-25). It is a natural conclusion of the message presented in verses 27-36 to have Jesus remind his followers not to judge others. Not judging is a part of that mercy God showers down upon the just and unjust. Not judging is another imitation of God. Furthermore, the parallelism Luke has been striving for in all his examples continues to be played out in verse 37. Just as Luke has provided three examples of self-centered, graceless behavior in verses 32-34, he now offers three examples of merciful behavior: do not judge; do not condemn; and do forgive.

The final image furthers the notion of God's imprudent graciousness. The "good measure" of God's grace we may normally expect is not what God wants to offer. In an agricultural marketplace economy, the fairness of weights and measures was a deadly serious matter. While no merchants would dare to be caught doctoring their scales, neither would they "press down" or "shake together" a measurement in order to assure customers a maximum amount for their money.

But God does not find even these actions beneficial enough. In God's extravagance, the "good measure" is poured out until it is "running over" \_ spilling over the sides of the measuring device and filling the robe-pocket or "lap" of the receiver. This is what God wants to pour out to us, Jesus declares, if we will only offer the same to others.

## Additional Resources

- [The Text this Week](#) – a huge archive of commentaries, blogs, sermons, etc. Note – this site collects resources related to ALL of the lectionary texts for a given week...not all will relate to the passage(s) being studied, but many will. You will have to sift!
- Check out other commentaries available for these texts (and others!) at [WorkingPreacher.org](#).

## Reflection Questions on Luke 6:27-38

1. This passage continues the “Sermon on the Plain” that was begun in last week’s lesson with Luke’s version of the Beatitudes (plus his unique addition of the “woe-itudes”!) Think again about this context, and about the geography which in Luke places these words on Jesus’ lips. Does it make any difference if you imagine Jesus offering these teachings from among the crowd on the plain, as compared to the mountaintop setting on which Matthew shows Jesus delivering these same basic words?
2. As these teachings of Jesus actual prescriptions for ethical living? Does he expect his followers to actually live according to them? Or they more of an ideal to which disciples should strive, but to which they could never be expected to be bound? Are these rules to apply to interactions with everyone, or only to relationships and interactions within the community of faith? What about pragmatic considerations...e.g. those such as children, who cannot defend themselves, being left to the mercy of evil and violence by those who practice the kind of non-resistance advocated here?
3. “The Golden Rule” of verse 31 is a near universal ethical guide in human religious traditions. But what does it really look like in practice? What do you do when the “as you would have them do to you” doesn’t match up on each side of the equation? How can one sustain such an ideal in real life?

**What questions do you have?**

**What do you “wonder” about when reading these passages?**