

“Expecting Nothing in Return”

Luke 6:27-36

6th Sunday after Epiphany

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Westminster, Greenville

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I wonder if any of you know the children’s book by Derek Munson called *Enemy Pie*.

Enemy Pie is narrated by a young boy who is enjoying a fabulous summer.

His sister is away at camp.

His father built him a tree house.

He is on the best baseball team in town.

Life is good!

Then a boy named Jeremy Ross moves to town.

And Jeremy Ross begins to SPOIL this boy’s summer.

- Jeremy laughs at the narrator when Jeremy strikes him out in a baseball game.
- Jeremy invites the narrator’s best friend, but not the narrator, to come play on Jeremy’s trampoline.

“Jeremy Ross was the one and only person on my enemy list,” the young narrator says. And he posts his “enemy list” in his tree house, and vows that Jeremy Ross will NEVER be allowed to visit.

When the young boy tells his father about Jeremy, his father has an idea. Pulling a faded cookbook off the shelf, his dad retrieves a yellow recipe card from its pages.

“This is the recipe for Enemy Pie,” says the dad. “I can’t tell you what’s in it, but I can say that it’s the fastest way to get rid of an enemy.”

And the son's imagination runs wild.
Enemy pie must require some pretty DISGUSTING ingredients.

So he tries to help his dad make the pie.
He offers his dad weeds from the garden.
He offers him worms.
He offers the gum that he's been chewing all morning.
And his dad says no, no, that's not how you make the pie.

So the boy goes outside to play, and then after a while, he notices a smell.

Not a bad smell... a GOOD smell.

The boy goes inside and asks his dad why the pie smells so good if it's for his enemy. And his father tells him that if it smelled bad, no enemy would ever eat it!

Clearly, his father had made enemy pie before!

And then the father sits his boy down and says:

“There is one part of Enemy Pie that I can't do. In order for it to work, you need to spend a day with your enemy. Even worse, you have to be nice to him. It's not easy...are you sure you want to go through with this?”

The boy agrees, and he bikes over to the home of Jeremy Ross.

And you don't have to be familiar with the book to see where this is going. The boys have fun together. They learn things about one another that they did not know.

At the end of the day, they have dinner at the boy's house.

For dessert, the scarf down Enemy Pie.
And the narrator realizes that he has “lost his best enemy.”¹

Love your enemies.
That’s what Jesus says in our text for today.

If we only had Mark’s Gospel, if we only had John’s Gospel, we would not have the command to love our enemies. But it’s one of those themes that stands out in the Gospel of Luke.

Not just in our text for today.

For example, if you skip ahead to chapter 9, there’s this verse about how Jesus was headed to Jerusalem, and he sent messengers ahead of him, and “they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; but they [the Samaritans] did not receive him...”

When James and John see what’s happened, they ask Jesus: “Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?”

After all—the Samaritans are our enemy!

But Jesus rebukes disciples for making such a ridiculous proposition. And then in the very next chapter, you know what parable Jesus tells?

The parable of the good Samaritan.

Love your enemies, says Jesus.

¹ Derek Munson, *Enemy Pie*, San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2000.

And oh, how it were as easy as baking Enemy Pie...

In so many ways, it feels like an impossible thing to do.

Well, not impossible.

We hear stories about people who do it.

I wonder if any of you caught the news last June when the Reverend James Lawson died at the age of 95.

Do you remember James Lawson?

James Lawson was prominent in the Civil Rights movement.

In fact, as a side note, when our high schoolers went on a mission trip to Memphis a few years ago, we visited a Methodist Church there, to help with one of the church's ministries to children.

During a break, I was looking at the pictures of former pastors from the church, pictures hanging on the wall.

And much to my astonishment, there was James Lawson's picture!
We were doing a mission project in his former church!

Why was I so excited?

Because Martin Luther King, Jr. called James Lawson "the leading theorist and strategist on nonviolence."²

One of Lawson's gifts was teaching others how to practice non-violent resistance. He held workshops for all those young people who went to sit-ins...where they would be mocked and yelled at and have drinks dumped on them.

² [The Rev. James Lawson, leader of the Civil Rights Movement, dies : NPR](#)

They might be beaten and thrown down to the floor.
But before they did it, James Lawson taught them how to do it.
He held practice sessions on how to turn the other cheek.

In other words, James Lawson taught those novice, never-done-it-before civil rights activists how to love their enemy. And because they loved their enemy, they helped change their country.

You see, loving one's enemy isn't an impossible thing to do.
But neither is it a natural thing to do.
It has to be practiced.

Just like all the love commandments in the Bible require practice.
Think about all the love commands in the Bible.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and might.
That's the Shema, Deuteronomy 6.

Love your neighbor as yourself.
That's Leviticus, chapter 19.

"You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt."

Do you know where that scripture comes from?
I'll give you a hint.
It was the first scripture you heard today.
Deuteronomy 10.

Or how about this?

"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another."

That's Jesus, in John's Gospel, talking to his disciples, on the last night of his life.

And that doesn't even take into account the love that we have for our family, for our friends...what is that, six different love assignments?

Then Jesus adds a 7th: Love your enemy.

So how many of you feel like you're an expert on loving your enemy?

Right.

Neither am I.

It has to be practiced.

Because every time I run into an enemy, or just someone who gets under my skin, I seem to make a mistake...

I recall, years ago, when my wife and I first moved to Indiana. Right after we moved, I went looking for a barber in Bloomington. After a few false starts, I thought I finally had one.

I was in this barber shop in Indiana on the day that the former NBA superstar, Reggie Miller, retired.

Reggie Miller played back in the 1990s, early 2000s.

He had a prolific career for the Indiana Pacers.

The day that he retired, the announcement was on tv.

I was watching the announcement in the barber shop, and my barber looked up and said, "Ah, Reggie Miller..."

And then he said something I cannot repeat from the pulpit, because it was an astonishingly racist remark.

The irony was that the barber wasn't trying to be derogatory. He made this remark in the context of expressing admiration for Reggie Miller.

He saw nothing wrong with what he had just said.

I was mad.

I paid my bill and I walked out.

After I walked out, I stopped in the parking lot.

Then I turned around, went back in, and told him in no uncertain terms why I would never be going back to his barbershop again. He wasn't too pleased with what I had to say, but I felt good about having said it.

And I never returned to that barbershop again.

Was that the best way to love my enemy?

I don't mean:

Did I do the right thing by letting him know I took offense at his comment?

I mean:

Did I do the right thing when I never returned to his establishment?

What would have happened if I had taken a different approach?

Let him know I was offended, but then I keep going back to his place to get my haircut, to build a relationship with him, and to keep talking with him about the way he saw the world, and the way I saw the world...

Would that have been a faithful thing to do?

Maybe that would have been a dumb thing to do.

After all, he was the one holding the scissors.

But do you see what we're talking about?

When it comes to loving our enemies, it's not a natural thing to do. It's a learned thing we do, something we need to practice...

Jesus said:

“Love your enemies...expecting nothing in return...
and you will be children of the Most High;
for [God] is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked.”

In other words, we love your enemy because it's part of our baptismal identity. It's who God created us to be. We are to be imitators of God, loving in a way that is as wild and expansive and gracious as the God we know in Jesus Christ.

Speaking of the grace of God, that's part of the problem with loving our enemies. We can easily get confused about who exactly it is that needs God's wild and extravagant grace.

A number of years ago, my wife and I had one of our vehicles break down on us. The gages on the dashboard stopped working. It had happened 7 months earlier, same problem, so we took it back to the same shop, figuring the problem would get fixed free of charge since it wasn't fixed correctly the first time.

After all, we had put \$1,500 in the first time, surely it was their mistake.

The shop came back and said—no, even though the symptoms are exactly the same, the cause is different—they wanted an additional \$1,100.

We were pretty mad.

We were convinced that they made a mistake the first time, and now instead of admitting their error, they were trying to swindle us out of more money.

I got on the phone with the shop manager, and among other things, I told him what he was doing was dishonest and greedy. I told him I would spread the bad word about his shop all over town.

“Be careful, now...”

“What are doing, threatening me?”

On and on I went...

I admit, I got a little carried away on the phone that day.

And I said something about all this to someone at the church I was serving at the time.

And he said, “Ben—it’s actually possible that it was two different problems with the same symptoms.”

Well...that got me thinking.

What if I had been wrong?

What if...after I got done chewing him out on the phone, the shop manager went home to tell his wife about his lousy day because some knucklehead called him a liar and a cheat!

And what if—

what if he went to his church the following Sunday...

and during his prayers, he prayed for me.

What if that day—I was HIS enemy?

What if that day—I was the person who was difficult to love?

We're going to make mistakes, right?

When it comes to any of the love commandments, especially loving our enemies, we're going to make mistakes.

It's why we need to practice.

So let me imagine something with you right now...

How many of you like to cook?

I don't cook very well myself.

My family will tell you that I'm capable of making a total of three things:

Tacos.

Burgers on the grill.

Spaghetti pie.

Now, I've tried my hand at Enemy Pie...but as I've mentioned, I can't quite get the recipe right.

It's why I need more practice.

So I got to thinking....

Surely, someone here has tried their hand at Enemy Pie.

Surely, many of you here have tried to create this divine dessert before.

What if we all brought our recipes for Enemy Pie to church this spring?

And then we shared them with one another, and shared the mistakes we make when we make that pie, and what ends up working, and then we go out there and we practice and we practice and we practice loving our enemies...

So I want you to picture this now.

Can you imagine the day when someone out there is going to say, "There's no one in Greenville that makes a better Enemy Pie than Westminster Presbyterian Church!"

I don't know about you, but I hope that day doesn't just stay STUCK in my imagination...

(Amen.)