

## **Sermon Draft**

**Text: Luke 6:27–38**

**Sermon: Love**

This Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany is the final Sunday of Epiphany season before the Transfiguration. It is a good transition from the Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany to Transfiguration as it continues to shift our focus from the things of this world, which bear no implication for our standing before God to seeing Jesus alone as our salvation.

There is an instance in Acts (20:35) where Paul quotes Jesus as saying something that none of the Gospel writers record him ever saying. In Acts, Paul writes that Jesus himself said, *“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”* While none of the four Gospel writers records that exact quote, they do record teachings that share the same message, teachings like we have in our Gospel for today. We are encouraged to love, bless, give away, and lend, not just to the deserving, but also to the undeserving.

Of course, if we're going to give something away, we first must have it to give away. So, we as Christians, are to love and give more than anyone, for we are loved and given so much by God. We are to love and give to all. After all, everything we have is given to us as a gift from God. We are merely stewards.

God has given us many material gifts, just as he gave many gifts to those who followed him in the readings we've heard throughout Epiphany. Even if we are not rich, God has given us many gifts (body, mind, family, friends, support). But because of who we are, sinful human beings we are selective with our love and our gifts.

Our first instinct is to keep, guard, and hold onto any and every gift we are given. We first must trust a person, get to know them before we can love them. We count and measure out every dime we have and what we need to keep before thinking about giving any of it away, even giving it to the church. We try to judge whether someone really needs or is worthy of our love and gifts.

Yet, Jesus tells us to love and give even to our enemies. Yet, we tend to use strict judgment and a stingier measure with those we don't know. We may not give to our neighbor if we think the gift will be misused (spent on drugs or alcohol). It is even harder to give to our enemies or those we do not like or who mistreat us. We may be willing to buy our friend lunch, but we do not like giving our lunch money to the school bully. The fact is; however, we are no better than any other sinner when we give only to those who we deem worthy of our charity.

Still we can love and give to all because we have been loved and given good in Christ. We all are able to give love, for we were first given and loved by our Father who is merciful. We have been given much love and many gifts by God. We are unworthy, yet God had mercy upon us. ***“Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.”*** (v 36) God gave us, his enemy, not just another cheek, a tunic, or an amount of money, but his very own Son. God has taken what seemed bad and made it for our good and the good of our neighbor, much as he did for Joseph (Genesis 45:3–15).

Jesus' horrible death is our greatest gift, it accomplishes completely everything necessary for our salvation. This worst event and loss of the life of Jesus is our greatest benefit. By Jesus' cross, we have been forgiven. In Christ, God promises us forgiveness even for selfishness and judgments. Nothing is won or lost by having more stuff. We are free of the necessity to do anything to earn eternal life or to gain anything for ourselves. What remains in this life is not a burden or some-thing that must be done to qualify us for heaven but a gift and an opportunity to love our neighbors and show them the love we have in Christ Jesus.

Let us measure who we are in Christ. What you have or do not have does not change who you are or what you are worth in Christ. It doesn't matter if you live or die with nothing more to your name than the change in your pocket or if you have a million dollars. Your salvation is accomplished.

It doesn't even matter if we live or die, because we have eternal life in Christ. In Christ, eternal goodness is given to us. God gives us the things of this world as a gift to be gifted out of freedom, not compulsion. The glory of these things is of one kind, but the glory that awaits us is of another. The gifts of heaven and eternal life are, as our text says; *“pressed down, shaken together, and running over into our lap”* (v 38), for we are measured not by what we do but by what Christ has done for us.

So, give it all away or keep it all. Have it all or have nothing at all. It makes no difference. All of it is nothing more than a gift, a thing that will soon fade like the grass and wither like the green herb.

What is this world to me? It is nothing, not a thing of any value or worth, for we have been bought by the Lord of glory with his own precious blood and his innocent suffering unto death. Regardless of the things we have or don't have, we do have the grace of God and the benefits of the cross. That is a promise from God to us.

So, what, then, of the things of this world—if they are of no benefit to us since our salvation has already been won? Well, we might as well use them for the benefit of our neighbor, that he or she, too, might share in the eternal life in Christ. After all, we are most certainly loved and given good by God.

Amen