

Seventh Sunday after Epiphany  
February 24, 2019

Text: Luke 6:27-38

Theme: "What Kind of Grace?"

Gift bags are for gifts. Here, I have one here. You can see it's a birthday gift bag. You find them for all sorts of occasions. Using a gift bag is easier than wrapping, don't you think? And if you are the recipient it doesn't take so long to get to what is on the inside, no concern with tearing the paper or not. Someone has to fill the bag; someone has to provide the gift. These bags don't manufacture their own contents. There is cost and effort involved, a price to pay probably. Someone has to give so you can get.

Get or give, which do you prefer? Yes, it is more blessed to give than to receive, but getting can be more fun, can it not, at least for the moment. It can be exciting to receive the gift bag. And then there is the box, a treasure box. You have seen me use this on more than on occasion. It is a container to receive valuables to store and to benefit from to enjoy later. It can be like an investment, a place for safe keeping and even gain on what is kept. It is the recipient of giving, a giving by those who hope to later get, a "give to get" box.

Jesus certainly has something to teach us today about giving and getting. Giving and getting and getting and giving and then this other "G" word, grace. Grace goes quite nicely with gift, gift even a good synonym. The Greek word for grace (*charis*, *caris*) appears three times in our

text, vs 32, 33, and 34. It's not translated grace. We read in those verses respectively, "If you love those who love you, what *benefit* is that to you?" "And if you do good to those who do good to you, what *benefit* is that to you?" "And if you lend to those from whom you expect to received, what *credit* is that to you?" All these could be translated, "what sort of grace?" This is a good question, "what sort of grace?" Is it a give to get grace, or a get to give grace, and which one is truly grace with the Gracious One as its source?

"Give to get," we are all pretty familiar how this works. We may not be thinking about it, but it's part of our everyday exchange. We do give to those giving to us. This is easy, natural to those doing good things for us like parents to children, or later children to parents. We could certainly throw in grandparents and grandchildren in this mix. Giving may be in response to a gift given, or maybe not for anything special. It's what you do for those who are part of your clan, even your tribe. This may be the group from which you face the world together. The members have the best interests of each other in mind. They know that whether it is expressed or not.

But this normal giving and getting and giving in return goes beyond families. It's what happens to those in relationships mutual benefit. It may involve suppliers and customers, co-workers and supervisors, dock workers and delivery drivers. There may be an exchange of compliments, greetings, thoughts of concern at difficulties, cards given on occasions in appreciate to customers. I have one here we recently received from Roto-Rooter after

they cleaned out a clogged line for us. There is a thank you and a card for \$10 off the next call, makes you almost hope for stopped up lines. We may receive Christmas cards from our bank, or maybe the car dealership.

Such actions are the decent and appropriate things to do. They are expected. They are courtesies extended in the work place, make life a little more pleasant. But they could well be a part of the giving to get outlook, a greasing of the cogs of commerce a bit. In return we may receive good words, and good feelings, and maybe some material benefit.

It can be an investment. Participating certainly makes life more pleasant. It's a lot better than being at one another's throats is it not?

It does work together for the increase of those investing. It is doing good to those doing good, and from whom you hope to receive good. What sort of grace is this? It's nothing that sets us apart from others as followers of Christ. Jesus tells us "even sinners" do the same. In Jesus' day sinners could include those like prostitutes and tax collectors. These were not people you would not associate with if you were "good" people. They may have been considered only a refuse for discarding if not burning. Even these people, Jesus was saying, were decent to one another.

Sinners are harder to find these days. What I'm getting at is that which was formerly judged to as sin, may now be okay, acceptable, and even commendable. This is certainly the case on issues that center around the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment. But most people still have a sin sense when it comes to 7<sup>th</sup> commandment, stealing. So we could still say and most people would understand, if you are nice to those who are nice to you,

what's the big deal. There is still honor among thieves. They are no strangers to the give to get box.

But listen to Jesus' words, "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who abuse ((**evphrea** , **zw** mistreat, insult) you" (vs 27, 28). We can't see this in the English, but all the imperatives here are in the plural. Maybe it's not so hard to say "Amen" to such things when we are speaking in principle. But then we get to specifics, where the rubber hits the road or the fist hits the face, a different matter. "To the one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from the one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who begs from you, and from the one who takes away your goods do not demand them back." (v 29, 30) Here the "yous" are singular. Jesus says, "I'm talking about you there."

These particular exhortations may well be in the context of facing your persecutor. The verb translated "abuse" in verse 28 appears in 1 Peter 4:13, "If you are insulted for the name of Christ, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you." It is hard to respond with good when bad is literally in your face. What will you do?

Maybe Jesus is simply telling us to stomach it for payback comes later. In verse 28 we read, "give and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap." (vs 38) Give good to those dishing out bad and you will receive better in the end. It's your wage, a giving to get. Could it even be a giving to get

even? What goes around comes around and the go around of their abuse on your will come around with the big whammy club of damnation. Is this doing good, enduring, to receive the better? Giving to get—what sort of grace is this? It is no grace at all.

Yes, we know all about giving to get whether we think much about it all. But how do we move to Get to Give? It is from given grace. It is from the giving of the Father, Son, and Spirit. Jesus says the Father is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. (v. 35) “Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.” (v. 36) Jesus tells us words found in Matthew 5 that he causes the sun to rise both on the evil and the good, that He sends rain both to the just and unjust (v. 45) He is good. His steadfast love endures forever. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.”

Grace is gift, the greatest gift is the Son for us. He is the one who is making quite the splash through His miracles and teaching. Recently we saw that unbelievable catch of fish. Last week we saw the sick being brought to Him to be healed along with those with unclean spirits. In verse 19 we saw people were coming to Him to be healed at His touch. There were many who were direct, hands on recipients of His giving.

We see that He puts into practice His own teachings. He does love all, even those hating Him, abusing Him, and condemning Him. He doesn't give back as good as He gets, but He takes more. He takes what we had coming to us, the very damnation inflicting blows of God's justice against our sin. As we saw three weeks ago He came to destroy the One who had the power of death. He rips the bonds of death asunder by

passing through it. He was put to death, but as Paul puts before us in our lesson from 1 Corinthians 15 today He is the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. He was raised no more to die but instead to reign. One day He returns for the full decimation of death. The bodies of believers will be changed or raised to be like His. All of this is from the giving of the Son.

But we would never believe this if not for the giving of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit enables us to know our full helplessness and hopelessness. Through the working of the Spirit we know Jesus as our Savior, our Lord, our brother, our life. Through the Gospel the Spirit is at work to ignite or strengthen faith in the Gospel. What sort of grace is this? This is the grace that changes us. It is given from God to us.

It is a now a get to give grace. We give from what we have been given. I have three gifts in this bag, actually three categories. They may not be surprising, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup>. These are in reference the articles of the Apostles' Creed. The 1<sup>st</sup> Article gifts are those of this physical life: body and soul, eyes, ears and all my members...clothing and shoes, food and drink house and home, land and animals, how God richly and daily provides. God supplies my needs and more and from this supply we give, do good to all especially those of the household of faith. From these we have to give to our brother but also something to give to our enemy who is hungry or thirsty (Romans 12:20). God gives the gifts of this life to me, but not just for me.

We have the good news of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Article gift of redemption, this good news of being purchased and won from all sin, from death and the

power of the devil with the holy precious blood of Christ and by innocent suffering and death that I might be His own land life under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness. If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation. Life is messed up because of sin, but life is okay, even redeemed in Christ, and one day more than some kind of wonderful. It is for me. Luther uses the singular in His explanation, My Lord, but not just for me.

But we have one more block, 3<sup>rd</sup> Article. As said, before only by the working of the Spirit can we know, understand, believe in the Savior. We are here together only by the working of the Spirit that calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth. In this church He daily and richly forgives all my sins, and the sins of all believers. We have the gift to give of forgiveness. Love keeps no record of wrong. We forgive as we have been forgiven. What sets us off is not being set off, to enable to overcome the evil with good. We are in the forgiveness business. Only with forgiveness is there life and salvation. Forgiveness is for me, but not just for me.

From given grace we now get to give as those transformed. Jesus does give us the promise that as we give it will be given, but our giving is not from the motivation of future return, but from hearts made new by grace given. We give thanks when gifts come back our way, but even when they don't, we know that any sufferings now are not worth comparing with the glory to come.

We get to give. This privilege we have been given. Praise God!