

Luke 6:27-38
Epiphany 7C
February 24, 2019

“Where’s Our Focus?”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Recall Jesus’ words to us last week. He tells us we’re blessed even, (Luke 6:22-23) “... *when people hate you ... on account of the Son of Man! ... your reward is great in heaven.*” No matter our troubles, we’re blessed – now – because we’re God’s children.

He continues encouraging us today. He helps us see how we’re to live as His children. He gives us words to help us focus our lives and actions. And our focus shouldn’t always be where the world tells us to focus. Jesus is quite countercultural as He says, (Luke 6:27-28) “*But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.*”

These are hard words. Love ... those who intend to hurt you. Do good to ... those despising you. Bless ... those invoking evil on you. Pray for ... those threatening you.

Imagine your worst enemy. Now ... imagine loving them, doing good for them, asking God to help them. That’s hard ... especially the way things often go in the world. When we see evil ... or worse, are touched by evil, our focus sharpens. Like a sword, we may want to cut those evildoers to pieces. We might despise. We might curse. We may not want to pray for them. Evildoers are enemies. We often focus on their destruction!

By worldly wisdom, Joseph, he of *Technicolor Dreamcoat* and *King of Dreams* fame, had every right to focus on his brothers’ destruction ... especially for what they’d done to him. In their hatred, they sold him into slavery and lied to his father that he’d been killed by wild animals ... covering their lie by soaking his cloak in goat’s blood as false evidence. Then, even though Joseph was sexually assaulted by his master’s wife ... he

was framed for assaulting her and thrown into prison. But by the grace of God, Joseph used his God-given gifts of interpreting dreams to gain his freedom. Pharaoh made him the second most powerful man in Egypt saying, (Genesis 41:44) *“I am Pharaoh, and without your consent no one shall lift up hand or foot in all the land of Egypt.”* Joseph had the power of life and death in his hands when his brothers came to him in the midst of famine ... begging for food for their families. Where was Joseph’s focus?

In 1960, a 6-year old girl named Ruby Bridges moved to New Orleans. Being black, her parents had to send her to kindergarten at the all-black school miles away even though a perfectly good all-white school was just 5 blocks from her house. When it came time for 1st grade, Ruby’s mom wanted her to go to the closer school. Ruby, a bright young girl, passed an exam designed to exclude her. After several delays, she became the first black child to enter an all-white, Southern grade school.

However, she had to be escorted by U.S. marshals through crowds of haters shouting racial slurs, threatening to poison her, and even displaying black dolls in caskets to keep her away. Only one teacher would teach her and no parents allowed their kids to be in class with her. The only kid in her class – Ruby persevered. Where was Ruby’s focus?

As Christians, our focus is a two-edged sword. We see sin as it is. What some call bad behavior ... we see, through the lens of God’s Word, sin. What some see as “the way I am” ... we see as sin. When some say, “That’s the way it is in the world” ... we see sin. But, when we see sin, especially when it affects us directly, where’s our focus?

When we see or hear about unspeakable evil happening in our schools, cities, or half-way around the world ... do we cast our judgment on the “evil doer”? When we hear of someone who’s assaulted others ... do we bring down the condemnation hammer? When

we hear of someone who's cheated on their spouse ... lied to coworkers ... or bullied and shamed classmates ... do we rank order their sin as so much worse than our own sins? As we focus intently on evil in the world, how often do we pass judgment and condemn others while self-righteously exalting ourselves saying, *"At least I'm not that bad."*

The Catechism defines "sin" as (LSC Explanation Question 20) *"Thoughts, desires, words, and deeds contrary to God's will."* Committing sin makes one a sinner. And we're all sinners. This means we're enemies of God. God's focus is on His enemies ...

So, what's God will for His enemies – including you and me? As soon as Adam and Eve brought sin into the world, God condemned – ***not*** mankind, but Satan – saying to him, (Genesis 3:15 (NIV)) *"And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; ***he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.***"* In other words, "Satan, you may inflict wounds on my children ... but I will destroy you!

Later, as Israel, steeped in sin, continued raging against God in their pagan worship, oppressing the poor, and shedding the blood of innocents, God spoke to them, (Ezekiel 18:31-32) *"Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed ... For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord GOD; so turn, and live."*

God's focus has always been on His enemies ... to make peace with them ... to reconcile with them ... to forgive them all of their sins. That's why He sent His Son.

Jesus focused on His enemies ... sinners ... in His midst. For example, He forgave the adulteress everyone desired to stone to death. He forgave the paralyzed man next to the Pool of Bethesda the Pharisees left for dead due to his and his parents' sins. Jesus said to them and many others, *"Your sins are forgiven ... go and sin no more."*

On the night of His betrayal, Jesus' continued to focus on living out His Word. Praying in the Garden ... an angry mob, bent on harm, came for Him ... armed with spears and clubs and shields. They were led by Judas, who kissed Jesus on the cheek. Jesus, turning the other cheek, said, (Luke 22:48) "*Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?*" Immediately, Peter pulled out a sword and hacked off a servant's ear ... Jesus, doing good to one hating Him, touched the man's ear and healed him.

He was led away during the dark of night. His enemies mocked and beat Him. They stripped Jesus of His clothing. They pressed a crown of thorns into His skull. They forced Him to drag His cross through the streets to the hill of Calvary. Along the way, Jesus prayed for the people who shouted for His crucifixion ... He prayed for His executioners, (Luke 23:34) "*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*" The Son of God loved ... did good ... blessed ... and pray for ... His enemies – that one day, they too might come to believe in Him and His promises. That they'd be transformed from enemies into brothers and sisters ... cleansed of their sins in the blood He shed for them and for you and me – given new life through His resurrection. This is the Father's focus ... that His enemies would be transformed, through faith in His Son, into His saved and redeemed people. This has always been His focus.

Joseph knew God's focus. He wasn't focused on avenging his brothers' evil against him. He focused on God's will for him and his brothers saying, (Genesis 45:4-8) "*I am your brother, Joseph ... do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life ... it was not you who sent me here, but God.*" Joseph didn't judge or condemn ... he didn't focus on his brothers' sins. He focused on God's will. He forgave his brothers – saving them from death.

Little Ruby remained focused, not just on her school work, but on God and His Word. The marshals escorting her daily admired her courage saying, “*She just marched along like a little soldier.*” But there was more to Ruby’s focus than pure determination. Each day she prayed for those persecuting her, “*Please, God, forgive them because they don’t know what they’re doing.*” Ruby mirrored the focus of her Lord, Jesus as He forgave those who crucified Him. She mirrored His mercy and grace toward her enemies.

God has always been merciful ... focused on making peace with His enemies ... transforming each of us by His Word, through the power of the Holy Spirit, into His children. In baptism, our Father adopts us into His family once again. He enables us to believe His outrageous promises and His focused love. He also enables us to live our lives with a new focus ... His focus. It’s not easy to live the life of a disciple! And Jesus never said it would be. We will fall short at times ... and God forgives us for those times. He promises (Psalm 103:12) “*As far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions.*” Then we pray, “*Our Father who art in heaven ... forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.*” God has forgiven us ... we ask Him to help us forgive others ... those who’ve sinned against us directly ... those who’ve sinned against us by sinning against those around us.

Let us focus on Jesus and His love and forgiveness toward us found on the cross ... helping others to see Jesus, not us, as we love and forgive them. Then, when Jesus comes back to judge the living and the dead ... He will call us, sons and daughters of the Most High, into His kingdom to receive our great reward ... eternal life.

May the peace of Christ be with you all. Amen.

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