



SAINT ANDREW'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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Sermon for Sunday, February 24, 2019

The Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany

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Genesis 45:3-11, 15 | Psalm 37:1-12, 41-42 | I Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-50 | Luke 6:27-38

How should we treat other people? Every society of human beings has worked out approaches to this question. Every religion and culture has some variation along the lines of, "Don't do anything to someone else that you don't want them to do to you." It's a rule that would make living in society a lot easier if everybody followed it, but they don't and won't because it is a rule based on restraint: telling people not to do something is a lot less attractive than encouraging people to do something so as to gain like treatment for yourself. Jesus in today's Gospel indeed tells us to do something, not to refrain from doing something: "Do to others as you would have them do to you." Jesus' commandment here is not to refrain from doing something, but to do something: not a restraint but an action.

"Do to others as you would have them do to you." This is often called the Golden Rule, but being human, we often find that hard to do in everyday life. When we are small children, it collides with our growing sense of justice: When disappointed, "It isn't fair" the children say, and too often this attitude persists into adult life.

In Jesus' words today about how we should show heroic love to our enemies, and not judge and condemn people, but rather be generous and forgiving, are not just words of advice about how to win friends and influence people.

Rather, what they show is God in action: when we behave well toward other people, forgiving, being generous, loving our enemies, doing good to those who wish us ill, not judging or condemning, and all the rest, we consciously or not, intentionally or not, are accurately reflecting exactly the way God treats us. And not doing those things means that we have forgotten or set aside awareness of the way God is treating us: generously, lovingly, and all the rest. A person's behavior toward others, Jesus tells us, is to be the reflection of the treatment he or she is unconditionally and undeservingly receiving from God. We are being called to show to others in our daily life God's treatment of us. And Jesus points out what follows from that: God responds in kind to our behavior: "Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn and you will not be condemned; forgive and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you."

The story in Genesis about Joseph shows all this in action. It's a long story, fourteen chapters in Genesis, and our reading today is the conclusion of it. When Joseph was a boy, his brothers resented his being his father Jacob's favorite, so they threw him in a pit and told his father he had been killed by a wild beast. Rescued and sold by Bedouin, he makes his way to Egypt and eventually is running the country for Pharaoh. The victim has become the victor. Famine leads his brothers to Egypt to buy grain, and Joseph, become all-powerful, eventually confronts them, now terrified and at his mercy, and reveals himself alive to his brothers in today's reading.

His family has hurt Joseph tremendously. The malice and hatred of his brothers cannot be forgotten, but can with God's help be forgiven. Does he indeed forgive his brothers? We cannot know.

Doubtless he vividly remembers their hatred of him, and what they did to him and the grief they brought to his father Jacob. But he treats his brothers as he would be treated. He sees God's hand in all that has happened to him. And he does not seek revenge. He enacts what Jesus will say: "The measure you give will be the measure you get back."

If we reflect in our own actions God's treatment of us, Jesus in today's Gospel tells us that God is prepared to respond in like manner to our behavior. Our own spiritual health and our relationship with God depend on our being willing to treat others as we would be treated. You might say our salvation depends on it. Amen.