



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

February 20, 2022

Pastor Randy Ott

7th Sunday after Epiphany

First Lesson: [Genesis 45:3-8a,15](#)

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 103

Second Lesson/Sermon Text: [Romans 12:14-21](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Luke 6:27-38](#)

Jesus is Revealed in Love for Enemies

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father: Amen.

In Christ, dear fellow redeemed:

Languages can be kind of interesting and even somewhat goofy at times as you learn different languages. I think German is kind of a goofy language at times. It has words that we don't really bring into English all that well. One of them is *gastlichkeit*, which means *hospitality*. It's really a German word for an excuse to drink. I think that's really what it means. There is another one that kind of fits in with what we're talking about today: *schadenfreude*. It's kind of a strange word. It really means something along the lines of experiencing joy at someone else's sorrow. Like, you didn't do real well but as long as the people you don't like didn't do well, you can still be happy. It's kind of a goofy word. We kind of have a word for that in English: Packer fan? When the Bears lose you're all happy, even if your team doesn't win. Isn't that kind of how it goes with sports teams at times. If you ask some people, "What is your favorite team?" they might say "It's this team and whoever is playing so-and-so." Do you ever say that or hear that? Then you probably understand what *schadenfreude* is.

But our God comes to us today and says, "Having joy at someone else's misery is not a mark of a Christian. When you get connected to me, it turns your world upside down. Instead of (all the examples He uses there) cursing those who curse you, you bless those who curse you. You pray for those who persecute you. You love those who hate you. You don't seek revenge. You do all the things that are completely and absolutely unnatural for your sinful nature." My sinful nature understands really clearly how to seek revenge; getting mad at people and wanting to get back at them. It understands treating people the way they treat me. I get that. That's my sinful nature. But those of us who are connected to Christ, who live in view of His mercy, He tells us we have to

reveal what it means to be a Christian by living differently than what your sinful nature wants to do. So that's what He talks to us about today.

Love your enemies and in this way you will reveal what the love of Christ looks like. It's a love that is undeserved and unearned. Obviously your enemy has never earned your love and your blessing. But if you're connected to Christ, you love unconditionally. That's a high task our God has called us to. It's not something we're good at. So today we'll look at it and see what it means and how we can do it, and why we even want to do it. It's all about Jesus. It's not about us. It's all about Jesus.

[Romans 12](#) marks a turning point in Paul's letter to the Romans. In [Chapters 1-8](#) he kind of went over Law and Gospel; how we are saved. It was a doctrinal portion of his letter. Yes, he talked about how we are to live in response to God in [Chapters 6 and 7](#) when he was setting up how we live for God as opposed to how we are declared not guilty, and he talked about the struggle we have and how we keep struggling against our sinful nature, but he is really still teaching about how we are declared "not guilty" before God. In [Chapters 9-11](#) he talks about his great desire that his brothers and sisters as Jews would come to know Jesus. But now in [Chapter 12](#) he moves to talking about *in view of God's mercy, offer your bodies as living sacrifices*. No more substitutes. In the Old Testament, all those animals that died were substitutes. Christ has been our once-for-all substitute, so no more substitutes. Now you live as a living sacrifice (not something that is dead and gone). You live to honor and praise God every day of your life.

Then he tells us what it looks like. *Use the gifts you have*. He had just talked about using them primarily within the body of Christ (among believers) and now, in what read to you, he starts moving from how you treat your fellow believers, how you live in view of God's mercy with your fellow believers to how you live in view of God's mercy with those (I'm assuming outside of the body of Christ because the body of Christ should know better) people that are persecuting you and hate you. We might do it from time to time, but I think he's talking more about the persecution they would face because now they are connected to Jesus.

He does it in that first paragraph that I read to you with these really short sentences. ***Bless those who persecute you...*** He goes on and on and on. Then, in the next part of it, the last verses, 17-21, he goes into more detail about what it looks like to love your enemies.

It's all about recognizing who you are. Who you are as a sinner who doesn't want to do these things, yet God, in His mercy and His love has given the ultimate sacrifice to live perfectly in your place and die in your place. So don't think it's all about you. Don't be conceited. Don't think of yourself more highly than you ought. Don't look down on those who are attacking you. Instead, love them like God loved you first. You love them

by doing the exact opposite of what the world around you would do. You love those that hate you. You bless those who persecute you. You rejoice with those who rejoice.

That sounds like something we would do, but maybe not always. Say you're in the workplace. You and someone else are up for a promotion, and they are a jerk. Let's just face it, they are just a jerk. They get the promotion and you don't. How hard it is to screw on that smile and walk over and say congratulations? Or do you even bother? Do you really rejoice with that person that is rejoicing? Or do you get kind of mad? This is what God is talking about. **Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.** No matter who they are or what they have said to you beforehand, you love them unconditionally like Christ loved you. That's what He calls us to do.

I can understand that is what He is calling me to do, but why? I don't really want to! If a jerk is a jerk, I should treat them like a jerk shouldn't I? That's kind of what I want to do. The good Lord gave me a quick mind and sharp tongue and I can treat them like a jerk better than anyone. Why in the world wouldn't I if it's natural and it's easy?

First of all, it's because Christ loved me and I didn't deserve it. I have to remember He also loved them when they didn't deserve it. So I want to love them when they don't deserve it. I want to bless those who persecute me or attack me.

Secondly He tells us that if the person you think is a jerk is actually a jerk; don't take your revenge on them yourself. Leave that in God's hands. There is a quote there from Deuteronomy in what I read to you. **"It is mine to avenge..."** ([Deuteronomy 32:35](#)). But my goal isn't even that God take revenge on them is it? My goal isn't *that person annoys me and they are a jerk. I really hope they burn in hell forever.* That doesn't sound like Christ-like love. My goal is that they come to know Christ. If they don't come to know Christ and they live separate from Christ, God will ultimately have eternal vengeance on them in their going to hell, but that doesn't bring me any comfort. Instead, what I really want is what he talks about in that last paragraph.

He talks about how we treat those who are attacking us. **"If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."** There is something my sinful nature can latch onto—third degree burns. I'm all for doing that to people who treat me badly. But that's not what God is telling you. So what does it mean? Give them something to drink; give them something to eat when this person has been attacking you so that it might heap burning coals on their head? It's really talking about leading them to repentance.

Maybe you've been in this situation sometime in your life where someone did something to you and you just let them have it. You did what your sinful nature wanted to do. You just tore into them and put them in their place and your sinful nature was doing a cheerleading routine as you were doing it because this is what they had coming.

You went over the line and above and beyond the call of duty in attacking them. How did you feel if they responded with kindness and love and gentleness towards you? Did it feel like burning coals on your head as you realized you went too far if you did something you shouldn't have done?

I've been there and done that. Maybe at times when I was disciplining my children I went too far because I was upset with what they did but my child responded with a smile and "I love you dad," and I felt like a complete and absolute idiot. That little kid led me to repentance immediately; burning coals on my head. Does that make sense? Do you know what we're talking about here?

So as you live and don't repay people with their anger or their hatred and as you treat them the way God would want you to treat them, as you love them unconditionally, one of your goals is that you heap burning coals on their head so that they turn away from their sin and they see that somehow, some way you have something different in your heart that they don't have in theirs—this ability to love the unloving. That's not natural. Where does that come from? Then you might have the opportunity to tell them you don't do it because you're such a good person, because really, you want to let them have it. You do it because God loved you first, so you want to get better at loving and better at loving and better at loving.

There is just no way around it. You and I are going to screw this up. We're still going to repay anger with anger. We're still going to act in ways that our sinful nature wants us to, but what we need to remember at those times, when the burning coals are not on someone else's head but on our own, that's when we need to remember that our Lord lived perfectly in our place. Jesus died in our place and His unfailing love surrounds us and forgives us. It's not just something we talk about at the start of the service to warm up our vocal chords for the second hymn. Confession and Absolution is a reality that we live in every day of our lives.

We are sinners who will fail our God, but our God, through the life and death of Christ, has removed our sins. What was in the Psalm? **For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him.** His unfailing love; isn't that what we said in the Psalm? That's what we go back to. And that unfailing love of our God moves us to want to get better at loving others, even when sometimes our love fails, because we have a God who is so gracious and merciful and He has privileged us with the responsibility of reflecting that love to all people, not just those we like but even those we don't like and who attack us. We love our enemies. In this way, we reveal God's unfailing love. Amen.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ([Philippians 4:7](#).) Amen.