

“GOD’S RESURRECTED PEOPLE”

Rev. Becky Stephens

Text: Luke 6:27-38 NLT**God’s Word: 1 Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-50 NLT****Luke 6:27-38 NLT**

²⁷ “But to you who are willing to listen, I say, love your enemies! Do good to those who hate you. ²⁸ Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who hurt you. ²⁹ If someone slaps you on one cheek, offer the other cheek also. If someone demands your coat, offer your shirt also. ³⁰ Give to anyone who asks; and when things are taken away from you, don’t try to get them back. ³¹ Do to others as you would like them to do to you.

³² “If you love only those who love you, why should you get credit for that? Even sinners love those who love them! ³³ And if you do good only to those who do good to you, why should you get credit? Even sinners do that much! ³⁴ And if you lend money only to those who can repay you, why should you get credit? Even sinners will lend to other sinners for a full return.

³⁵ “Love your enemies! Do good to them. Lend to them without expecting to be repaid. Then your reward from heaven will be very great, and you will truly be acting as children of the Most High, for he is kind to those who are unthankful and wicked. ³⁶ You must be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate.

³⁷ “Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn others, or it will all come back against you. Forgive others, and you will be forgiven. ³⁸ Give, and you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full—pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, running over, and poured into your lap. The amount you give will determine the amount you get back.”

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In her book, The Hiding Place, Corrie Ten Boom—a Christian woman--tells about how her family used to hide the Jews from the Nazi’s during the Holocaust.

Eventually, Corrie and her family were caught by the Nazi’s for doing this and sent off to one of those horrendous Concentration Camps. At the Concentration Camp, Corrie saw some of the cruelest acts imaginable perpetrated by one group of humans onto another. Her entire family died...including her dear sister Betsie. After she had been

freed from the camp, Corrie would often speak in churches about Jesus and His love and forgiveness for humanity.

Corrie's faith had been challenged and strengthened during her horrible years of torment...but another real test confronted her afterwards. In her book Corrie writes:

"It was at a church service in Munich that I saw him, the former S.S. man who had stood guard at the shower room door in the processing center at the concentration camp. He was the first of our actual jailers that I had seen since that time. And suddenly it was all there—the roomful of mocking men, the heaps of clothing, Betsie's pain-blanching face. He came up to me as the church was emptying, beaming and bowing. "How grateful I am for your message, Frauline." He said. "To think that, as you say, [Jesus] has washed my sins away!"

Corrie writes:

His hand was thrust out to shake mine. And I, who had preached so often to the people the need to forgive, kept my hand at my side. Even as the angry, vengeful thoughts boiled through me, I saw the sin of them. Jesus Christ had died for this man; was I going to ask for more? Lord Jesus, I prayed, forgive me and help me to forgive him. I tried to smile, I struggled to raise my hand. I could not. I felt nothing, not the slightest spark of warmth or charity. And so again I breathed a silent prayer: 'Jesus, I cannot forgive him. Give me Your forgiveness.' As I took his hand the most incredible thing happened. From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand a current seemed to pass from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me. And so I discovered, writes Corrie, that it is not our forgiveness any more than our goodness that the world's healing hinges, but on Christ's. When Jesus tells us to love our enemies, He gives, along with the command, the love itself.

Wow! That's the kind of radical discipleship that Jesus is talking about in our Gospel Lesson for this morning:

- \*Love your enemies
- \*Do good to those who hate you
- \*Bless those who curse you
- \*Pray for those who abuse you
- \*Turn the other cheek
- \*Do to others what you would like them to do to you
- \*Be merciful just as God is merciful
- \*Forgive as Jesus forgives you

That is not normal behavior is it? These are not things which come easily for us...

and yet...in our heart of hearts we know them to be the “right way to live.”

Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, is this the way you and your classmates generally interact with one another? Adults, is this the way we normally interact with one another? Do we love and pray for those who hate us and curse us and mistreat us?

In our Epistle Lesson from 1 Corinthians that Pastor Mike read for us earlier Paul is talking about the Resurrection of the Dead, and generally when we talk of the Resurrection of the Dead we are talking about something which will take place when Jesus Christ returns to earth...at the end of time.

But the Resurrection of the Dead does not simply refer to the Resurrected Bodies of believers at the last day. It also, is something which takes place here and now in those of us who put all of our faith and trust...our entire lives into the hands of Jesus Christ!!!

Remember when Jesus’ really good friend Lazarus died? Well, Lazarus’ sister Martha ran out to meet Jesus Who was on His way to Lazarus’ house. *“Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “If you had been here, my brother would not have died.”*

And then Jesus says to her: *“Your brother will rise again.”* To which Martha answers: *“I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”* And then Jesus tells her: *“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.”*

My friends, those of us who live and believe in Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord...well, we have already been resurrected from the dead!!! And as those who have died with Christ and have been raised to life in Him...well...we are called to live in this world as A Resurrected People!!!

And how do we do this? Well, we do this by trusting in Jesus Christ for our every thought, action and reaction. When others treat us wrong...our natural selves will most likely be filled with angry and vengeful thoughts which will boil through us.

If we act on these thoughts, we are sinning and we are not living as Resurrected people...we are living as if we were still dead in our sins!!! And this is not a happy or fun or joyful, or peaceful way to live. Anger only breeds more anger, and hate only breeds more hate...as we suffocate under the weight of it all!

But when, as believers, we live within the Resurrection of Jesus Christ...we are brought from death to life...and we are given the freeing power to experience the forgiveness of God...just as Corrie Ten Boom did...as “into” her “heart sprang a love for” that S.S. man

who had been involved in the killing of so many innocent people that it “almost overwhelmed her.”

It is NOT possible for us to experience such transforming love on our own. This love, forgiveness and healing only comes as a gift from God. Most certainly, when Jesus tells us to love our enemies, He gives us, along with the command...the very love itself!!! What a privilege!!! What an honor!!!

As a Resurrected People, God is more than willing to equip us and allow us to experience the very love that God has for us and for everyone else...if we only will allow Him....

Do you know what the term “Christian” means? It means literally: “Little Christ’s.” And that is what we are called to be in this world. We are to love our enemies...and thus be involved in transforming this world for Christ...We are to do good to those who hate us...We are to blow the world away and leave it’s people astonished as we bless those who curse us and pray for those who abuse us...we are to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth...we are to be Christ to all we meet...we are to live into our calling to be “Little Christ’s” or Resurrected People who have died to self and now live for God!!! And in living this way we will bring many other people into the baptism of Christ’s death and Resurrection!

Are you experiencing this Resurrected Life right now?

When you look out at a lost and angry world...do you see this world through the loving and forgiving eyes of the Savior Who prayed from the Cross: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing”?

I don’t know about you, but I find these teachings of Jesus to be some of the very hardest to live by. They go so far against the grain of the way we naturally react. This astonishing message from Jesus reverses all conventional wisdom. In a society in which children are murdered for their designer clothes, in which deadly violence enters our schools, in which bombs go off under daycare centers to make political statements, in which airplanes are used as missiles, these words of Jesus may seem as idealistic and impractical today as they did to those who first heard them. But they are the standards of Christian discipleship.

And if the world is to be turned upside down, we must take the risk of praying to Jesus:  
*“I cannot love and forgive and live this way...Give me Your love...Give me Your forgiveness...Give me Your life!!!*  
Amen.