



# SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY, FEBRUARY 23, 2025  
GENESIS 45:3-11, 15; PSALM 37: 1-12, 41-42; 1 CORINTHIANS 15:35-38, 42-50; LUKE 6:27-38

## REWRITING THE STORY

*Luke 6:27-38 [Jesus said, “I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you. “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. “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. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.”]*

If we ever needed proof that Jesus was not a politician, today’s Gospel could be Exhibit A. No one ever won an election by saying “love your enemies.” The games we know how to play have winners and losers. When the only way

we win is if someone else loses, we benefit from demonizing the enemy. When they threaten us, we tend to respond in kind and say it’s how we win. As long as we play this game, the cycle of violence and retaliation continues until

we're a mirror image of our enemies – different talking points, same tactics, different heroes, same war.

It's all so tiresome and sad. Isn't there a better story to tell?

We get hints of a better story in our reading from Genesis. For those who haven't seen *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* lately, here's a recap: A cocky 17-year-old is sold by his brothers into slavery. The brothers then tell their father that Joseph is dead. Game over, or so they think. 22 years of needless grief and blatant injustice follow. Yet Joseph, the trafficked one, rises through the ranks in his new home and ends up holding the keys to his family's future. When his brothers come to him in a time of famine begging for food, they don't recognize him. He knows them, though, and he tries at first to play the game of winners and losers. But the futility of it all becomes overwhelming, and he chooses in the moment we witness to rewrite their story.

He could have chosen otherwise. He could have humiliated them in public as a raw demonstration of power. But he

doesn't. Before he reveals himself, he sends everyone else away. Likewise, he could have sworn vengeance and done to them what they did to him. Or he could have whitewashed the truth, avoided conflict at all costs, and pretended that the violence done to him didn't matter. Of course, it matters. His brothers' actions were spiteful and cruel. He doesn't deny what they've done or why they did it.

But he sees a greater hand at work as well and isn't afraid to name it. He sees God working through their mess to save lives in a time of famine, reassembling their broken pieces so they can be whole again if they choose. He gives them all a new story – where the power of God to preserve life is stronger than any attempt to destroy it – and he invites his brothers to live into that story with him. By the grace of God, they do. And the proof that this isn't just Joseph wallpapering over their problems with pious God talk is that he acts in line with the God he names here. He acts to save the lives of those who betrayed him. And as a result, the cycle is broken. Their past no longer

determines their present; a new and better future is possible.

Are we allowed to do that – rewrite our stories in hope of a better ending? That’s, in part, what today’s psalm invites us to do. Sure, we can obsess over the evildoers in our lives and live inside the stories they tell. We can fret and allow their tactics to dictate ours. We can let them set the terms and the timelines for our battles and live in a state of constant warfare. We could do that; but it’s not healthy, and it doesn’t help those we claim to defend. Those who’ve lost their jobs or their land, who are in danger of deportation or at risk for losing their health care, those whose identities are being denied, who have good reason to fear – they deserve better than knee-jerk reactivity. Such hair-trigger outrage, when not backed up by thoughtful action, is not productive and leads inevitably to either shrill self-righteousness or paralysis and despair.

What’s the alternative? The psalmist’s counsel is pretty balanced, actually. We hear all the traditional advice about trusting God, being still and waiting patiently for what can only be revealed in

time, letting God be our stronghold and refuge, our source of identity and worth. That’s all good and helpful counsel. But it’s not all that’s there. It’s not just about orienting ourselves correctly and rewriting the story; it’s also about doing good and living into the new story, committing our way to God and moving as that way leads.

And lest we need help filling in the blanks for what doing good in this new story looks like – we have Jesus in the Gospel at his most challenging and direct. Love your enemies. Please hear me; this is not about legislating our feelings or pretending that blatant injustice is OK for the sake of politeness. We’re not whitewashing or wallpapering over anything. No, love is defined here by the actions that follow – by how we pray, how we give, how we lend. How can we act in line with the character of the loving God we name in this place? That’s the question. Because when we love our enemies, we flip the script entirely. We undermine the cycle of violence and retaliation by insisting on the intrinsic value of every human being.

As followers of Jesus, we will not reduce relationships to transactions; we will not use money as the measure of anyone's worth; we will not let anyone's desire to destroy lives be more powerful than God's will to preserve them. The only way we'll win is if we play a different game. When we lead with kindness and

generosity and mercy to save lives, we stop letting our enemies set the rules. We stop being their mirror image and resemble Jesus instead. We live by a better story – where the past no longer determines the present and a new and better future is still possible. I know which story I'd rather tell. Amen.



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