

Do No Harm, Do Good, and Love God Faithfully
Scripture: Psalm 37:1 – 11, 39 – 40 & Luke 6:27 – 28

A ball mark of good Christian practice is to do no harm, do good, and love God faithfully. The 37th Psalm is poetry that give credence to such basic instruction. The psalmist reminds believers not to get upset over the wrong in the world. We live in a world that is defined by competition. We live in a competitive world! I was an assistant coach for the HS boys' basketball team for 6 years in Millville PA. I mainly helped coach because my youngest son, Sam, was on the team. I coached the JV team and assisted the head coach with the varsity team. My main duties for the varsity team was to coach a player who was taken out of a game on the bench and to keep our head coach, Rick Thomas, from getting a technical foul. Coach Thomas was an animated coach and he was very vocal with the referees. He never used bad language but he would get on the officiating of the game. I my six years as assistant coach, Coach Thomas on got two T's! Often some players on the bench and I would sing 'Kumbaya' to calm Coach Thomas down. It was hilarious to hear players and I singing – Kumbaya my Lord, Kumbaya! We had many successful seasons with three district titles and making it to the quarter finals at states. Being a minister in town at the Millville CC (DOC), I was approached by a group of fans who thanked me for praying with the team to win games. They thought my pre-game prayers were for victory. In this competitive world, they thought my pre-game prayers were for victory. They were NOT! My pre-game prayers were to uplift the boys' physical skills and to pray that the teams, both Millville and our opponent, demonstrate good behavior and sportsmanship on the court. We do live in a competitive world, but God has more important things to worry about then a HS basketball game victory!

In this world, we are constantly compared to others and we often internalize this behavior and begin to measure ourselves in relationship to others. We ask why bad people receive good things while we continue to struggle. At times, it is easy to look at others and become angry. We harbor anger and rage against others which serves us no good. We become unhealthy in our hatred of others. If we have a relationship with the Lord, we can release ourselves and others of such unhealthy things. We are admonished by God to do so knowing that the wrong, evil, and ungodly will not last always. We are called to do no harm, to do good, and love God faithfully.

Even in our struggles, God shows himself to be present, powerful, and purposeful. The help of the Lord can come in many ways and forms. Verse 39 & 40 of Psalm 37 remind us that God is our refuge in the face of uncertainty and wickedness. Hear these words again – *The salvation of the righteous comes from the Lord; He is their stronghold in times of trouble. The Lord helps them and delivers them from the wicked and saves them because they take refuge in the Lord.*

We must reside in God's love. We must allow God's love to transform us even in our moments of anger and resentment. While we may never understand why bad things happen to good people or why it sometimes seems like the wicked are rewarded, God's love and presence in our life endures. We should be comforted knowing that God is always with us, even when we are lost in struggle and confusion.

Our Lukan text from chapter 6 reminds believers that our faith is an act of resistance. In a time wrought with indifference. In a time when we are divided across numerous social changes of inhumane treatment. In a time when practicing unconditional respect and uplift others is challenging, we need a faith that resistant to these changes!

Jesus' sermon transitions from the assurance of blessings to responsibility. It transitions from siding with the poor to the divine imperative to loving enemies. This instructional discourse grounds the Christian ethos. Jesus is detailing the ways in which God's priorities, which are against the ways of the world, should shape our actions.

The purpose of Jesus' directions for relinquishing material goods or to practice civil disobedience is to challenge systems. The world's systems, laws, and processes are inherently inhumane and absent of love. Those called by Christ are required to embody and exercise love upon all people. Those called by Christ are commanded to embody and exercise love on all creation.

Love is shown in sacrifice of our stuff and ourselves. Our Gospel text provides us with a new way of being in relationship with one another. Jesus calls us to respond to others according to God's love. This means that we must abandon our urge to 'get even' in order to respond in a way that shares God's love and protects our humanity. When Jesus suggests turning the other cheek after being slapped previously, Jesus is not simply challenging our culture, but he is encouraging us to show civil disobedience in the face of dehumanization.

These actions are representations and expressions of truth in the face of power. Jesus' teaching is against the world's assumptions and norms. Social ideals grant allowance for equal or greater response to hurt, harm, or danger if upon an individual or that which they control. When someone mistreats another, it is neither unusual nor unacceptable to reciprocate such mistreatment. Rather, as Christians, we are called to work in the example of our ultimate ethical witness – Jesus Christ! We are called to show love and compassion upon all people!

Love and compassion is Christ's way and it should be our way. Nowhere in the New Testament does Christ lash out at others with hatred and anger. Christ may rebuke others but it is done out of love for the overlooked people in his day. Christ speaks poorly of some people, especially the religious leaders of his day, but it is because they lack compassion on those in need and because they have humanized the law to their benefit and image, not God's divine nature of the law.

Oh yes, Christ calls us to show love and compassion on all we meet. Christ teaches us to do no harm, to do good, and love God faithfully!

Let us pray:

Unto the God whom we trust; Unto his Holy Son whose example of goodness and love we follow; and unto the Holy Spirit who shapes us, strengthens us, and sustains us – send us forth into this world in love. Let us look inward, outward, and upward to lead a life pleasing to God.

AMEN.