

## I.

Passages like the one we heard this morning from St. Luke's gospel  
get right to the heart of the Christian faith: love.

That's what it's all about folks: **love, Love, LOVE!** And we just love "love."  
Don't we? -- Especially being Episcopalians.

We're just all about love these days.

***"If it isn't about love, than it isn't about Jesus!"*** Amen? Amen!

So let us be attentive then to what Jesus himself says about *love*.

Continuing on with the Sermon of the Plain that we started to hear last week,  
Jesus pivots from the blessed and woe teaching and says, "Love your ***enemies.***"

Jesus doesn't stop there though, he even tells us how to love our enemies!

"Do good to those who hate you,

Bless those who curse you,

Pray for those who abuse you."

This notion of Love that Jesus is talking about,

the way of Love,

It's not the weak love of sentimentality,

nor the petty affections offered by our consumeristic

and un-holy day of Valentine's name.

There is no chocolate in today's gospel lesson. But there is a lot of love!

The heart of Luke's Sermon on the Plain is revealed to us today: Conduct yourself with love. And not just towards those who it is easy to love. Conduct yourself with love, period. And yes, even your enemies.

But few of us have any real enemies, right?

And by that I mean people who are actively engaged  
in seeing to it that our lives are a real misery.

Having said that, it occurs to me that there are people in all our lives that do spend  
Real "quality time" getting under our skin:

There are the people who misunderstand you...

And people who misjudge you...

And people who try to convince others that you are an evil person,

When in your heart you know that you are only trying to do your best.

And... unfortunately...

there are those here today

who are or have been victims of injustice.

But most often of all, our enemies are those who want their way instead of our way,  
and they are steadfast about it with a stubbornness that we fail to understand!

Because we KNOW that we are right! And we KNOW they are wrong...

And... then, for the purpose of not stirring up the waters,

We will smile at them and mostly play nice...

but under our breath

and most often with our actions demonstrate our superior position.

Okay then, so maybe we do have enemies today... would you not agree?

Stop and think for a moment: Who is your enemy?

“Love your enemies.”

“Do good to those who hate you,

Bless those who curse you,

Pray for those who abuse you.”

## II.

One of the effects of original sin is our inherent need to demonize others,

And especially those who are opposed to us.

We embody this in our secular culture when we hear it said,

“don’t get mad, get even.”

Or when we bend Sacred Scripture

to approve of personal vengeance:

“An eye for an eye. A tooth for a tooth.” ...

No, personal vengence is not the way of Jesus,

and this “eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth” stuff never works, does it?

Maybe that’s why Jesus demands something different.

First off, it should be obvious that in the game of vengeance, nobody wins.

In fact, everybody loses...

Certainly, your enemy loses when you seek revenge to which you reply,

“Yes Father, but isn’t that the point?”

Fair enough... but no matter how much your enemy loses through your vengeance, your enemy will never lose the one thing they most need to lose: *enmity*.

In fact, the more you try to affect a “pay-back,”  
the deeper the enmity is likely to become.

When you seek revenge, you lose also. You permit yourself to be dragged down to your enemy’s level. You become like them: a person of anger, of bitterness, of hate.

Instead of conquering your enemy’s evil, you really are conquering yourself.

So, what’s the alternative?

### III.

To love your enemies.

Suppose, instead of vengeance, you extend forgiveness.

Suppose, instead of cursing your enemy, you bless them.

That’s the way God treats his enemies, and do you know how I know that?

***Because, that’s how God treats us.*** – We make ourselves God’s enemies every time we choose our own selfish desires rather than following His holy will. And instead of cursing us, He loves and blesses us.

I mean, isn't that what Jesus is doing right now? At this Eucharist; around this altar?

He is welcoming us, *His enemies*,  
who have failed him so often,  
who will continue to fail Him,  
who have denied or betrayed Him in a hundred ways,  
whether secretly, half-secretly, openly and even brazenly. ...

To you, to me, His enemies, Jesus extends here the ultimate welcome,

The ultimate show of loving your enemies:  
He invites us to His holy table,  
where he feeds us on His own body and blood.

When Jesus does this, he fills us with the fire of love,  
to melt away our frozen hearts of enmity,  
and to warm us so that we can begin to love Him back.

But not just to love Him: to love one another also.

That is what your Lord Jesus Christ is asking us to do in our Scripture reading today:  
To share with others the forgiveness and love that he lavishes on us, his enemies.

Feasting on the food of Heaven, we are no longer enemies of God.  
Feasting on the food of Heaven, you can no longer hate another person.  
Feasting on the food of Heaven, your enemy is now your friend.  
And you are called upon to act like it,  
“for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.”