

7th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Cycle C, 2.24.19

1 Samuel 26:2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-23/
1 Corinthians 15:45-49/Luke 6:27-38

FULL MEASURE, PRESSED DOWN, SHAKEN TOGETHER

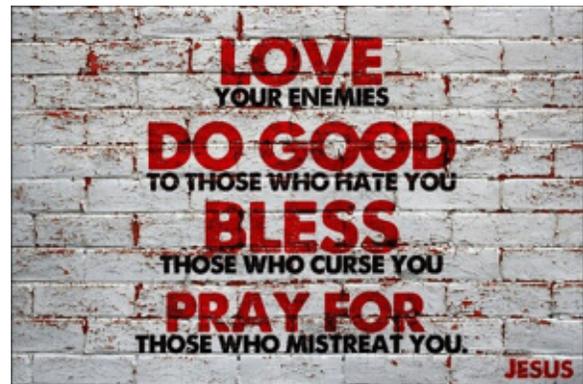
Last week I wanted to catch some of the movies nominated for Oscars before the Academy Awards show tonight. Someone gave me tickets to see the short films – you know, the ones no one ever sees except at a special showing. Anyway, before the show I went to the refreshment stand to get a bag of popcorn. Thank goodness someone gave me the movie tickets for free because the medium popcorn set me back \$7.50. When I finally got to place my order after a long line of customers I noticed something I had seen many times before but never paid attention to. The young man behind the counter opened the bag and with his little aluminum shovel began pouring popcorn into the bag. When the bag looked full he tapped it a couple times to make room for more popcorn.



It looked really full to me. But then he took his scooper and poured more popcorn on top of the bag until it was spilling over, including on the counter when he handed it to me. I grabbed a few of the kernels with my mouth so I wouldn't lose any.

The last line of today's gospel came to mind. *Give, and gifts will be given to you; a good measure, packed together, shaken*

down, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap. For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you." It seems like there's always room for more if we actually work at it. Christian living is all about going the extra mile, sharing above and beyond the call of duty, not taking offence at the insult or injury an enemy inflicts on you. Those are tall orders because those aren't our natural inclinations. Those responses come from another world – a world that is often the opposite from the one we know, from the way we tend to live. Yet that's the world Jesus invites us to inhabit.



However, without understanding the world of Jesus and the context of his preaching, it's easy to misinterpret Jesus' instruction to "turn the other cheek."** Jesus isn't telling us to be doormats, to simply and passively accept mistreatment. After all, he challenged hypocrisy, stood up to religious and political authority and was never afraid to question abuses of power, sometimes sharply. So let's look at some of these gospel instructions that seem hard to swallow. First - *turn the other cheek*. In that culture, as in many Middle Eastern cultures today, the left hand is considered unclean. In this imagined scenario, the person striking uses his right hand. Now, within the class divisions of the time, a superior would strike an inferior – say, a master and a slave - with a backhanded strike.

So if you're struck, by turning and offering your other cheek and almost daring them to strike you straight on, the oppressor faces a dilemma. If he strikes you straight on, not with a backhand, then he is hitting you the way that culturally one hits their equal. All of a sudden, the tables are turned.

To turn the other cheek would be to say, *"Try again. Your first blow didn't do what you intended. I deny you the power to humiliate me. I'm a human being just like you. Your status doesn't change that fact. You can't put me down."* "Turn the other cheek," then, in the context of those who first heard Jesus' words in Roman-occupied Galilee 2000 years ago, isn't about being passive, but responding to violence and injustice with resistance, courage and God-given human dignity.



Secondly, *"from the person who takes your cloak, do not withhold even your tunic."* Remember those hearing Jesus' message lived under Roman occupation and heavy taxation. In the scenario, the one demanding your cloak would have probably been seeking payment of a debt, one caused by the heavy burden of Roman taxation. Scholars explain that a poor

person would have really only have a cloak and a tunic – to give up both of these things is to essentially strip naked! Now, unlike our culture, in that culture of Jesus' time the shame was experienced by the person who saw the other naked. So if you gave up your cloak and tunic, standing naked, you've escalated the situation, creating a drama that exposed the injustice. You stand naked before your oppressor; that's a powerful critique of his unjust action. All of a sudden, the tables are turned. It isn't about being passive at all, but responding to violence and injustice with resistance, courage, and God-given human dignity.

Finally, *walk the extra mile.* Again, context is everything. By law, a Roman soldier could come up to anyone in their occupied territory and say: *You there, carry my pack for one mile.* But if you insist on carrying the bag a second mile – you'd be requiring the soldier to break the law! All of a sudden, the tables are turned. Now you're the one with more power. It isn't about being passive at all, but responding to violence and injustice with resistance, courage, and God-given human dignity.

In each of Jesus' examples, the enemy is neutralized, not destroyed. The cycle of violence is broken, the violence of the oppressor is exposed. The God-given human dignity of a poor person, the one on the margins, is uplifted. The system that strikes people, takes their few belongings, and compels them to carry a heavy load is put under a microscope and taken down. So, today's Gospel isn't about passively accepting injustice or mistreatment – that's not Good News. Today's Gospel isn't about simply shrugging our shoulders when we witness cruelty or are victimized or bullied.

This Gospel challenges each of us, as it challenged the original listeners, to creative nonviolent resistance to injustice.



We pray at every Eucharist: *Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.* Only in our daily living, when the words of the Lord's Prayer become the impetus for our deeds of mercy, especially toward our enemy, will we fully know the mercy and love of God. That will be our "expensive popcorn" –

given to us in "full measure,
pressed down, shaken together,
running over into our laps."

Loving our enemies and doing good,
expecting nothing in return –
these are the keys that unlock
our prison gate and set our hearts free.

John Kasper, OSFS

(**Grateful acknowledgement to Sister Rhonda Miska for her scriptural insights into the cultural world of Luke's gospel – catholicwomenpreach.org)