

Love that has no boundaries Luke 6, 27-38



27 "But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, **28** bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. **29** If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. **30** Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. **31** Do to others as you would have them do to you. **32** "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners

love those who love them. **33** And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. **34** And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. **35** But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. **36** Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. **37** "Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. **38** Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

When Pilate interrogated Jesus and Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world," Pilate sensed he was standing before something greater. That's why he asked the famous question: "What is truth?" Nowhere is the essence of the Christian faith more clearly visible than in the commandment to love one's enemies. It is precisely in this that non-Christians recognize that this is not about a philosophy, a political party, or someone trying to sell or manipulate. Rather, they encounter the living God, whose very essence is love—and who even loves his enemies. On the other hand, there is no Christian characteristic that is more difficult to put into practice and more overwhelming than the commandment to love one's enemies. For example, what do I do when Christian love of enemies is demanded and I am told that as a Christian I must forgive and forget? I know that this hardly ever happens anymore. This is because most non-Christians have also realized that Christians do not always practice what they preach. Even among us Christians, the relativizing phrase quickly arises: "We live in this world and must orient ourselves according to worldly criteria." It's true that Christians also defend themselves in court and therefore take out legal insurance and go to the police when they are wronged. The danger is therefore great that we relegate the commandment to love one's enemies to dusty filing cabinets as mere theory. Is the commandment to love one's enemies then just one of those inexplicable and unfulfillable things that have nothing to do with practical life? I am certain that the Lord Jesus neither wanted to burden us with an impossible law nor did he want something from us that is impossible to fulfill. When we talk about loving one's enemies, it becomes clear that Jesus is serious about love, on the one hand. On the other hand, he is also serious about the fact that we Christians have enemies in this world. Jesus prepares us for this reality, because Satan doesn't want to simply stand idly by while people follow God. Even for Jesus' disciples back then, the concept of an enemy was not an empty one. They were hated because they contradicted the fundamental tenets of Jewish or Greek law. Sometimes it was also because, as disciples of Jesus, they were different in their private lives. Very often, it was simply

because they went against the grain. We modern Christians are all familiar with this hostility. Christian persecution continues to rage bitterly in most countries, and even here, Christianity is increasingly ridiculed. Those who do not follow the path of the majority must expect daily slander, vilification, and threats. Our Lord Jesus does not want to deceive us. He tells us clearly that Christians will have enemies and that we will be hated and even killed. And the question is, how can we Christians deal with such hatred? God is love and God is merciful. That is part of his very being. And God wants this love and this mercy to be put into practice. When people do something truly terrible to us, there is a great immediate danger that evil will not only remain in the world but will also penetrate my inner being. When I am under terrible persecution, it is only a small step until the wickedness reaches my heart and I want to strike back in kind. And that is precisely what God wants to protect us from. He wants to protect us from the evil that takes root in our hearts. I know of an example of this ability not to be influenced by evil from the last World War. A mother had to flee with her child. Eventually, she was captured. The child was torn from her arms, and she had to endure unspeakable tortures from her captors. After several decades, mother and child were reunited. The daughter then asked her mother, "Mother, how could you endure all that? War, captivity, torture?" The mother replied, "Child, what does all that have to do with me?" With this, she wanted to make it clear that she hadn't let evil touch her, not even when she experienced it firsthand. She didn't need to, and didn't have to, carry the guilt of her torturers with her for the rest of her life. That was their responsibility. Therefore, she could put it all aside and didn't have to be bitter. This old woman managed to keep terrible things at bay, even though they persisted throughout her life. She managed to forgive the deeds of her enemies and was therefore free! Jesus himself preserves precisely this freedom in his life. This doesn't mean that Jesus gave free rein to evil. When he was before the Sanhedrin and a court official slapped him, Jesus didn't turn the other cheek, but asked: "If I said something wrong, prove it to me; or if I said something right, why did you strike me?" The advice Jesus gives us to turn the other cheek isn't a moral law. Rather, it's a challenge not to let evil run rampant. When someone slaps us, it's an insult and a humiliation. Most people react with anger and hurt, and are then driven to a second, violent act of revenge in response. We know this spiral of violence in all its forms in our world. Jesus wants us to remain true to our identity as children of God. And in that context, turning the other cheek can be a challenge to evil itself! If someone does something wrong to us, we shouldn't let ourselves be drawn into the vortex of evil, but rather let God guide us. Only in this way can we understand Psalm 23: "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows." With this certainty that we have a firm calling from God, we do not allow ourselves to be unsettled by the violence and wickedness of this world. This does not mean that Jesus is against all forms of violence. I find no passage in the Bible where Jesus calls on soldiers to lay down their weapons or urges them to only punish criminals with pillow fights. In our world, it may sometimes be necessary to use force to prevent something worse. When Jesus says, "Love your enemies!" he is not giving us a political program. And yet, Jesus wants to show us that the life of Christians is completely different from life in this world. Today, November 9th, we especially remember the time when hatred against Jews erupted into a violent pogrom in Germany. The end result was cold-blooded murder and mayhem. This hatred, which penetrates hearts and whose fruits end in murder and manslaughter, can still be seen today.

The evil nature of hatred is everywhere and seeks its place first in people's hearts and minds. Hatred establishes itself as hatred between rich and poor, between men and women, between right-wing and left-wing political parties, between old and young—the

list is endless. Later, all of this degenerates into hate speech and even later into murder and manslaughter. This hatred was already at the beginning, in the first fratricide. And event then it came from the same root of Satan. Jesus offers something different. We are to love those who hate us! When Jesus says this, it is not idealism. He wants us to truly love our enemies! For when we love our enemies, it becomes clear that love is unconditional. This is precisely how we prove whose children we are. When Jesus suffered the most terrible agony on the cross, he remained true to his nature and loved: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing!" In loving our enemies, we thus move on the path to the cross. Only before the cross do we realize that love is truly invincible. For it is only before the cross that I no longer ask what the other person has done to me, but rather what Jesus has done for me. Love of enemies leads us Christians into the fellowship of the crucified one. Only in Jesus does it become clear that hatred not only can be overcome, but is overcome. For love is solely the love of Jesus Christ, who went to the cross for his enemies and prayed for them there. Before the cross, we Christians recognize that we ourselves were among Jesus' enemies, overcome by his love. This love makes us see, so that we recognize the enemy as a brother and thus as a fellow sufferer. Why? Because we ourselves are in need and require the love of our Lord. Just like the enemy who hates me. Paul writes in Romans that God accepted and loved us as his children even when we were still enemies. That is true love of enemies!

In Jesus, we recognize the essence of love and the essence of God. In malice and hatred, we recognize the essence of evil. We Christians live in this world. Therefore, we also experience evil! It can be tempting to choose evil and give in to it. Most of the time, this happens much faster than we think. But whoever has tasted God's love knows that God's love is stronger and has overcome the world. Amen.