

ALDRSGATE UMC OF BUTTE, MT
406.782.2425 ... www.aldersgatebutte.org

Pastor Matthias Krier
February 20, 2022
7th Sunday After Epiphany

Message *“Conventional Wisdom vs. Unconventional Wisdom”*

For the past few weeks, we have taken some time to count our blessings. If you have not already done so, I encourage you to stand by the bulletin board and read what others have said in counting their blessings. As I was reading these blessings, there was absolutely nothing said about a sense of humor. Maybe we take a sense of humor for granted, but for my Dad who had a rare disease for 48 years of his 81 years of his life, a sense of humor was not a luxury, it was a necessity. My Dad lived a full life with a rare disease because he kept a sense of humor about everything. For example this cartoon reminded me of something my Dad would have said:



My Dad was very witty and very practical and he would say such things like this. Everybody has a story and we do our best to listen and understand stories from all kinds of sources but especially our beloved Bibles.

We begin with the parallel of this passage from Matthew: *“But I say to you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you ...”*
Matthew 5:44

Now you do not have to agree with the Jesus Seminar on what they believed about this verse, but the only part they put in red as something Jesus actually

said was *“Love your enemies.”* The second part, bless them that curse you and do good to them that hate you was put in the color gray as something that Jesus may not have said, but it reflects his ideas.

If we could truly love our enemies what would that look like?

Keep in mind, we don't have to like our enemies, but we are commanded to love them! The same is true for our beloved neighbors and our beloved relatives. We do not have to like them, but Jesus commands us to love them, period! Not only are we to love our enemies, we are to bless those who curse us. Not only are we to bless those who curse us, we are to do good to them that hate us. First of all, this sounds impossible, does it not?

This all sounds good, but if we cannot even love our neighbor or an estranged relative of ours, how can we love our enemies especially those that wish to harm us in some way. Let's come back to this? This next verse is as equally challenging to me as well:

Whoever hits you on
the cheek offer him
the other also; and...



whoever takes away
your coat... do not
withhold your shirt
from him either.

Luke 6:29

Knowing-Jesus.com

This particular verse as you can see on the front of your bulletin is in red and believed by the Jesus Seminar to be something Yeshua actually said. We know that there is the conventional wisdom of this world and there is the unconventional wisdom of Jesus. Keep in mind things are not always as they seem.

Walter Wink explains in detail what is behind this saying from Jesus and if you have not heard this explanation before, you may be surprised.

"Jesus specifically stated that, if one is struck on the right cheek, he is to turn the other cheek. There are two ways to strike a person on the right cheek – a backhanded slap with the right hand or a flat-handed slap with the left hand. In the culture of that day, one did not slap another with the left hand because it was used for "unclean" purposes. To receive a left-handed slap was the height of insult. A backhanded blow was the way a superior treated an inferior. Either way, Jesus implied that a superior was beating an inferior.

Jesus came down hard on the Pharisees because they thought they were better than other people. He taught His disciples never to despise other people or think themselves better. His yoke was humility – viewing themselves in their rightful place in God's world. However, at the same time, He did not allow socially inferior people to be treated with contempt.

A non-violent way to protest such treatment would be to "turn the other cheek", forcing the assailant either to stop the abuse, or to recognise that the one he treated unfairly was really his equal. The only way he could continue beating him was to admit that they were equals."

As we strive to get into the heart and mind of Jesus, things are not always as they seem in scripture. Turning the other cheek has a different meaning for me since learning what Walter Wink conveyed to us just a moment ago.

The next part of this verse: *"Whoever takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either."*

While this unconventional wisdom seems very impractical, whoever said that being a follower of Jesus was practical. Anybody? No. Being a follower of Yeshua is simply not practical if we take these teachings seriously. I believe Jesus is trying to confront us on our materialism and again just how out of whack our priorities are.

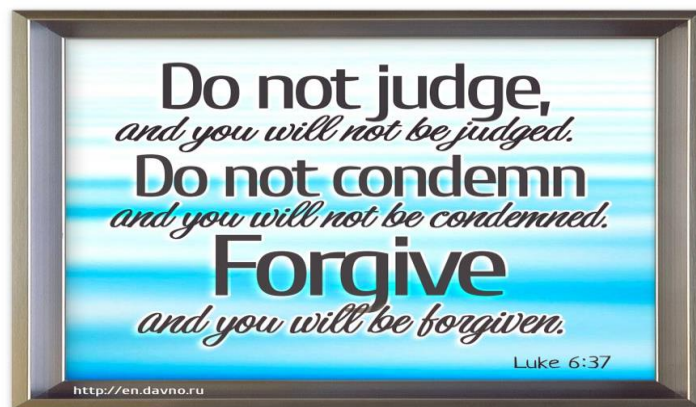
We are not meant to be a reflection of this world! We are meant to be a reflection of the Divine. We are meant to reflect "kin-dom" values, not this world's values. Let's face it, for many Christians we would rather gossip than give of ourselves.

Be careful indeed about gossip: *"For the one who gossips to you, will gossip about you."*

Gossip has no place in the church or outside the church.

I would say that if we are having trouble with gossip or speaking ill of another, try this. Imagine Jesus, however it is you imagine him, standing in your midst while having this conversation. If you truly do this, it will change the way you are having a conversation. Try it and it will change the way in which you have certain conversations.

As followers of Yeshua we are asked not to gossip and not to judge:

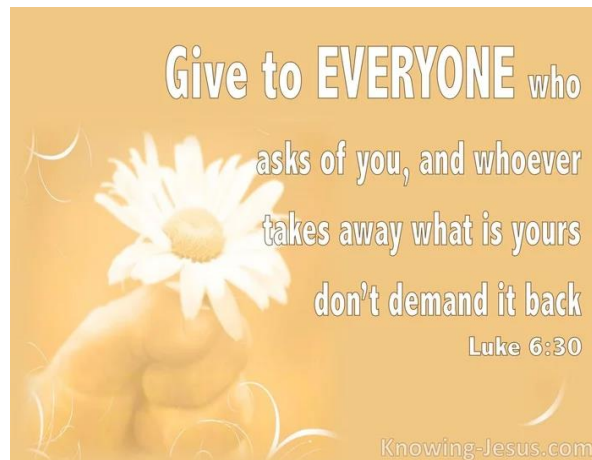


These words speak for themselves and it would be a good spiritual practice to meditate on these words as we strive to be followers of Jesus.

I have noticed and I suspect you have as well that there is a good deal of fatigue out there. Folks are tired and folks are exhausted which has resulted in a lack of patience with one another and possibly ourselves. Understandable, but maybe, just maybe we need to count our blessings daily and realize it could be worse.

For millions in poverty or whose homes have been destroyed by fire or natural disasters, or family members or friends are suffering from COVID or maybe even have died as a result of complications from this virus. Face it, things can always be worse and we need to count our blessings one by one.

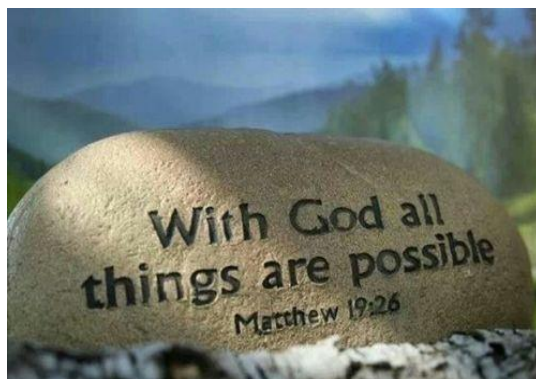
This next verse continues in the vein of unconventional wisdom and for many of us, doesn't make sense to us, but here it is:



This may be one of the most difficult for me, because just as I don't believe in letting folks bully us or those around us, I don't believe in just handing out cash to panhandlers. I confess to you and to God right here, right now, that I will not hand out cash to panhandlers. I have offered a meal at a restaurant or to help put gasoline in their vehicle or to give them a gift card at a coffee shop for a hot cup of coffee, but I will not just hand out cash where I might be contributing to someone's addiction where they can buy drugs or alcohol.

Now how in the world can we possibly strive to live out these unconventional teachings of Yeshua? How is this even possible?

That's right, by the grace of God ...and from the Gospel of Matthew we can affirm:



Let us pray: Help us this day and everyday, O God, by the grace of God to not hate or gossip and to not judge. Instead, help us to love our enemies, our neighbors, our relatives. Help us to experience forgiveness, where forgiveness is needed for we know that when we forgive, we are forgiven. Grant us the wisdom and the courage to discern who we are called to be and what we are called to do in day to day situations. Help us to live out these unconventional words of wisdom from Jesus, today and everyday. Amen.