

Living Lent | March 6

Challenges of The Gospel

Jesus said, "I say to you who are listening, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you.

"If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

"Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back."

Luke 6: 27-38 (NRSV)

Encouragement for the Lenten Journey:

Jesus begins our Gospel lesson today with a fourfold challenge:

1. To love our enemies
2. To do good to those who hate us
3. To bless those who curse us

4. To pray for those who abuse us

That's quite a challenge! Primarily, because the world has taught us that we should hate our enemies, cancel those who hate us, curse those who curse us, and destroy those who abuse us. Clearly, the way of living that Jesus is trying to teach us is different than the way of the world.

Jesus' way of living asks us to go the extra mile in the ways that we relate to others. To go above and beyond in doing unto others as we would have them do unto us. Jesus asks us to refrain from condemning, to embrace forgiveness, and to be generous. What a countercultural charge!

It seems to me that part of what Jesus desires for us here is that we would define ourselves as His followers by what we are for rather than what we are against. Defining ourselves by what we oppose is the way of the world. Jesus' way turns the world's teachings upside down.

Perhaps if we embrace Jesus' new way of living, extending God's grace to the world, this Lent we would find for ourselves the very same grace we have extended "in good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over."

Contributor and Contributing Body of Christ

The Reverend Dr. Jonathan Smith is the Senior Pastor at Pittman Park United Methodist Church in Statesboro, Georgia. Pittman Park is a church centered on making disciples of Jesus Christ and transforming the world in Jesus' name. Since 1956, Pittman Park UMC has been a vital and active congregation, raising up and deploying Christian leaders for mission and ministry in the world. Pittman Park UMC remains engaged as a Partner with Morningstar Children's Home as it has for several years, especially in the provision of housing during evacuation needs. Reaching God's children of all ages... PPUMC.

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Perry, GA 31069

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