



## “God Made Known in Forgiveness”

Seventh Sunday after Epiphany  
Saturday and Sunday, February 23-24, 2019

All Services

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Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Genesis 45:3-11, 15; Psalm 37:1-11,39-40;  
1 Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-50; Luke 6:27-38

Grace and peace be to you from our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

I should have called on the phone one more time. Kurt and I met in 1993. We were both young pastors in New York City. We became fast friends. We would do things together, we'd go golfing, and skiing, family did things together, a family vacation together. We continued to do that after he accepted a call in his home state of Michigan.

We were best buddies. We would call each other, we would leave funny inappropriate gag messages on our phones. We talked church, the church's mission, evangelism, church growth. We'd go to conferences together, we had a passion for sharing the gospel. He was my best friend and I loved him like a brother.

He helped me through a hard divorce. He rejoiced with me when I met Linda and he was the best man at our marriage. I would have done anything for him.

When I joined the Bishop's staff in New York, it was a lot of hard work, long hours. Kurt also had a growing dynamic ministry in Michigan. He had a lot of hard work and long hours as well. We just didn't seem to have the kind of time that we had before for each other. On top of it, Kurt began to experience his own marriage problems and his focus had to be on that.

I called and left messages but didn't hear anything back. I did text messages and didn't hear anything, I would call again, just never heard anything back. I decided at some point that I just wasn't going to call anymore. I took the silence as rejection of our relationship that I had so cherished.

A year and a half later, Kurt contacted me and said that he was coming to New York and he wanted to have a visit. I thought this would be a great opportunity

for reconciliation. Linda planned a really fantastic dinner for Kurt, but then as it got closer, he was delayed and ultimately, he didn't show up. I took it as a personal rejection. And that was it. Friendship or no, I decided that I wasn't going to be the person who was going to call.

In the ancient world of Jesus, life and relationships are governed by the idea of **Quid pro quo**, a favor for a favor. We see that over and over again in Jewish, Greek, and Roman literature and culture. The patronage system among the Romans, a patron solidified his or her position in the community by "giving" something, by placing others at his or her debt, and receiving from them these obliged acts of service and reverence.

There's a famous scene in the movie *The Godfather*. The very beginning of the movie the Godfathers meeting with the local undertaker who is looking for revenge from a daughter who had been abused by two young men. After back and forth with the Godfather, the Godfather finally says, "Someday, and that day may never come, I will call upon you to do a service for me. But until that day, accept this justice as a gift on my daughter's wedding day."

**Quid pro quo.**

You give something and you get something, it's the way of the world.

In Luke's gospel, Jesus is upsetting the empire of quid pro quo. He is asking people to accept a complete inversion of the world order of the Romans, of giving something to get something.

In Jesus, love is expressed in doing good that is not passive, but that is proactive: doing good, blessing, forgiving, praying, offering the second cheek, even giving the shirt along with the coat.

The love of Jesus is not based on obligation of who owes what to who, but it's offered freely, wholly, extravagantly, with no strings attached. Love that is based not on some predetermined contract, but instead on the very character of God who loves us.

Now there are several words in Greek language which the New Testament is written for love.

There is *Storage*, the first love revering to natural affection.

There's *Eros*, which means a romantic love.

There's *Philia*, which means the love between friends in which we get the city name Philadelphia, the City of Brotherly Love.

And there there's the word that's used in this part of Luke's gospel, it is *Agape*. In the Bible it is the highest form of love and it's chosen and willed by the person who is doing the loving. *Agape* is selfless, sacrificial, unconditional love, shown

even when the loved one has no cause or merit to receive such love. Agape mirrors God's love for us, who don't deserve the love and mercy and forgiveness we receive, but God in Christ really offers it to you and to me.

Jesus is teaching to us a trinity of discipleship: love, forgiveness, generosity.

Madeleine L'Engle wrote, "Love isn't how you feel. It's what you do."

And Jesus' entire philosophy of life is based on this active love, love that does something. But to you who are listening, Jesus says, love your enemies. . ." Did you catch that? To you who are listening. . ." Not everybody listens, not everybody heeds the words of Jesus.

I don't know about you, but I get the sense that our world is getting cranky. You know what I mean? We talk about compassion and love, but we're so quick to judge and to get angry. We don't listen to each other.

I want to give you a little test now. I am going to throw out some words and want to get a sense, just think of your emotions as you hear these words, okay?

Trump  
Pelosi  
Alt right  
Left wing  
Russians  
Socialism  
NRA  
Gay  
Black Lives Matter  
White Privilege  
Climate Change  
Catholic  
Holy Roller

How did you do? Some of us come here on Sunday morning tired, or distracted, or maybe we're even angry about something. Sometimes we come here and we're not even sure why we're here. But whatever the reason, sometimes we're not ready to listen, to listen to the Gospel that Jesus shares with us.

Because listening would mean that we have to open ourselves up to something new.

Listening means that we need to be open to change.

Listening to God means we need to be obedient to God.

Listening to God may even mean that we should love our enemy.

Jesus knew that there would only be a few people that may be ready to listen to his message and be open to the revolution of love and new order that he's proposing. But to those who really listened, Jesus says, he offers a philosophy of life that provides hope and salvation and helps you and I get to know God in a much-deeper level.

I've often thought about the relationship that I had, and I lost with my friend. When I was in Michigan this past fall for a spiritual retreat, I posted a message on Facebook and I received an instant message from Kurt who had saw my check-in post.

We met at a local restaurant not too far from the monastery. It had been seven years from the last time that we spoke. He himself had gone through a divorce. His daughter is now getting married. His other kids were doing really well, his health was good. We talked about our ministry. We talked about how quickly life goes by.

I wished that I had called my friend one more time through those lost years.

We shared our sadness at a friendship that both of us deeply missed. And we forgave each other and promised to stay in touch.

Be loving as God is loving.  
Be merciful as God is merciful.  
Be forgiving as God is forgiving.  
Be generous as God is generous.

And if you need to, please make that phone call.

Imitate our Master, be like the Lord. Take on his characteristics of love, forgiveness and generosity.

And when we do that the preferred life that Jesus has in store for us will be realized. Our own faith will deepen. Our commitment to God will be enriched, and our friendships with each other will be renewed. Amen.

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