

Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany – 2025

Genesis 45:3-15

1 Corinthians 15:21-26, 30-42

Luke 6:27-38

Christianity hasn't changed in two-thousand years. I can say that authoritatively because Christianity is not man's religion. Christianity is God at work in this world, through His Word, through His Spirit, to unite Himself to sinful men, sinful women, sinful children. Christianity hasn't changed into two thousand years; hasn't changed since the Lord Jesus was lifted up on the altar of the cross; hasn't changed since the sublime sacrifice of Good Friday and the mighty resurrection of Easter morn; hasn't changed since the Holy Spirit was poured out on Pentecost. Christians too have been the same since those days, the three days of death, rest, and resurrection. Christians haven't changed since the fire of the Holy Spirit was unleashed on the infant church. A Christian's character in 2025 is the same character as a Christian in the days of Nero. In all places, at all times, God is the dynamic force behind our character, the force behind our faith, and our love. Love hasn't changed. The circumstances of life change. Love doesn't change. Our Lord's commands don't change.

I can say with great certainty that I know your character. Perhaps not all the crooks and nannies but the building blocks of faith, hope, and love. St. Paul wrote this about himself, about you: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself up for me" (Galatians 2:20). That's a baptismal reality. Being "in Christ" is baptismal language. In Holy Baptism, you were crucified with Christ and raised a new creation – the old has gone, the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17). His life is in you. That's why a Christian in the first century is the same as a Christian in the 21st century. It's a beautiful thing to be a Christian. It's not easy, but it is beautiful. What's not easy about it is us loving as the Lord loves. In this congregation we are disinterested in an academic sort of faith, disinterested in a faith that is abstract or disconnected from how we live. The Ten Commandments are vital words that shape our doing. We do not divorce the spiritual from the physical. And we are straightforward about sin. Sadly, we commit it. Each of us commits sin. All of it displeases our Creator, our Redeemer and our Sanctifier. We repent; actively; we turn away from sin; truly; we amend our lives in truth. A Christian cannot and will not faithlessly live in sin.

We are forgiven. Christ's blood cleanses us of sin. His absolution is a present reality. Christ's forgiveness is real, tangible in His body and blood. We receive it gladly and live refreshed in the knowledge of God's love, God's favor, God's blessing. These realities invigorate our soul. The Gospel pulls us forward in this life. We meet adversity with courage, knowing that heaven is our home. And we love our enemies. There is only one reason for this. We love our enemies because Christ loves His enemies. And He is at work in us to will and to act according to His purpose (Philippians 2:13). This isn't a theoretical love. This isn't a sentimental platitude. This is dirt-under-your-fingernails loving your enemy. And let's get one thing straight right away: folks make us **their** enemies. We don't reciprocate. It's other people's hate that we forgive. "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you" (Luke 6:27). What do y'all think of that?

When Jesus says that the servant is not above his master, do you take that seriously? “A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master” (Matthew 10:24-25). Did the Lord Christ love His enemies? You know the answer to that. The most horrific torture was perpetrated against Him, the Divine Author of life, and He pleaded with His Father for their forgiveness as He bled, as He was mocked and spit upon and cursed (Luke 23:34). Enemies; Jesus died for them, saved them, delivered them from their sin, from judgment and hell. Love saved God’s enemies. Me; my sin is not some sort of inert, passive antipathy toward God. Sin is living and active. And Christ met that sin with love. Christ met my sin with a sacrifice. “For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life” (Romans 5:10). I was the enemy that was loved. You are the same.

How many of y’all believe that Christ’s love is in you? How many of y’all believe that your life is enlarged, richer and more joyful and sunnier because Christ’s love has claimed you, resides with you, directs you and uplifts you and consoles you and blesses you? I believe that. No doubt about it, it’s not easy to love one’s enemy. What are you going to do with Jesus’ call to action? How many people are there for whom you have an active disdain? How many of y’all think that love is a quid pro quo enterprise – loving only those who love you, loving only those who are good to you? The Lord blows that idea into oblivion. Can you conjure up any concrete examples in your life, examples of *how* to give, *how* to love those who hold an active disdain for you, an active disdain for Christ and His church? Jesus gave concrete examples, examples that people could relate to, examples that had a pretty high cost. Jesus spoke of one’s outer garment. The outer garment that people wore was instrumental to life. To survive, one needed this garment. An enemy receiving our outer garment and the inner garment as well; that’s a high standard of love.

How many of y’all believe that loving your enemy is like rolling out of bed, easy-peasy. It strikes me as having to be a deliberate act of one’s will, a determined decision. We have to apply ourselves to tasks that are difficult. Assuming that you believe that it is worth doing, how are you going to do it? How will you love your enemies? Martyrs in the first century possessed Christ’s character. They died confessing their faith. In 2015, Coptic Christians from Egypt were executed by Islamic terrorist on a Libyan beach. Hate is real. The greatest false prophet is Satan. He is the father of lies and a murderer from the beginning (John 8:44). Your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8). Hate is the kindling he uses to stoke the fire of unbelief. Listen to these lines: Though devils all the world should fill, All eager to devour us, We tremble not, we fear no ill; They shall not overpower us. This world’s prince may still Scowl fierce as he will, He can harm us none. He’s judged; the deed is done; One little word can fell him (A Might Fortress Is Our God – LSB 656, st. 3). Love is the Victor. Hate, no matter how fearsome, does not win. Death and resurrection is love in action and that love is flourishing in this place.

There is a great struggle going on all around us. Christ’s love and the world’s hate, Christ’s sacrifice and the world’s unbelief, Christ’s truth and Satan’s lies. Everyone is a participant in this struggle, willing or unwilling. No one can evade truth. No one can evade light. No one can evade Christ. He is our judge and our Savior. He is saving love invading our worldly realm and He does not leave us to our own devices when He calls us to love our enemies. He is our

Captain and He is still on the field. He has amassed an army. He has equipped us with His character. He relates; He is pained when we endure the slings and arrows of our enemies. But love is our armor, love is our weaponry, love is our fortress – Christ’s love, an eternal and enduring and victorious love. This resource He has given us to spend and spend it we will. Like our forebears throughout the history of Christ’s church, we will spend the love He has vested in us. To the glory of His name and the benefit of our children, those who follow us in the way, we will love. Our Father is merciful and we will be merciful. God’s name will be hallowed, His kingdom will advance, and Christ will manifest His character in His people. There is purpose in His call to action. Christ calls us to love our enemies and His cross stands towering over this whole world.