

These are under the heading “NOW THAT I’M OLDER....”

Don’t be worried about your smartphone or TV spying on you. Your vacuum cleaner has been collecting dirt on you for years.

If you can’t think of a word, say “I forgot the English word for it.” That way people will think you’re bilingual instead of an idiot.

I’m on a diet, so I ate salad for dinner. Mostly croutons and tomatoes. Really just one BIG ROUND crouton – covered with tomato sauce, and cheese. FINE, it was a pizza....OK, I ate a pizza! Happy now?

Yesterday I did a week’s worth of cardio after I walked into a spider web.

OK, enough nonsense. Last week we heard the section from Luke immediately preceding this with the ‘blessings and woes.’ (vv 20-26). This carries into what we read today. Unlike Matthew’s version of these sayings, rightly called ‘Beatitudes’ because only blessings are listed, Luke creates a careful symmetry in this text. Four ‘blessings’ are pronounced, followed by four parallel ‘woes’: poor-rich/hungry-full/weeping-laughing/rejected-accepted.

Now in verse 27, another 4-part saying is offered by Jesus. But unlike the blessings and woes, these sayings make up an active command from Jesus. When Jesus declares to His audience, “Love your enemies,” this is a general principle....a principle that is immediately made specific and active. The ‘love’ Jesus calls for is not an emotional or sentimental attachment. This love is actively oriented because it is actively pursuing good for the enemy. “Do good,” Jesus commands. He doesn’t say, ‘Think good thoughts or have good feelings,’ but actually “do good to those who hate you.” Just as there were 4 blessings and 4 woes, verses 27-28 detail another 4-way command: love the enemy; do good; bless; pray for. Calling His listeners to bless and pray for the enemy is an even more difficult task. Blessing and praying are motivated from the inside, not simply outside. Cosmetic ‘goodness’ is easier to fake than a real, honest prayer for the enemy to be blessed.

While the ‘mistreat’ Jesus refers to in verse 28 can be interpreted as physical abuse because it follows closely on the heels of the reference about those who ‘curse you,’ most translators suggest that verbal abuse – insults, ridicule, name-calling, etc – is intended. However, please note that Jesus says PRAY for someone who abuses you – He does not say to STAY with someone who abuses you.

Luke suggests that our behavior should be governed according to GOD’S principles – not the retaliatory, vengeful, retributory instincts of human beings. Working against normal human responses is taken to even greater heights as Luke continues in verses 31-36. Here, loving the enemy is taken far beyond the mere reciprocal ethic that governs most people’s lives. Just as the aggressive, abusive behavior of ‘enemies’ should not be allowed to shape our behavior towards them, neither should the loving, respectful behavior of our friends influence our actions! Regardless of an individual’s status – friend or foe – that person should receive the same treatment from our hands and heart. Luke gives 3 examples of how offering love, goodness, or even services – in this case lending money – to those who reciprocate in kind is easy, something “even sinners” do.

Verse 35 encapsulates the higher vision that God is calling us all to embody. This mandate goes even beyond the golden rule, a ‘rule,’ by the way, which can be found in ancient Babylonian texts and in the

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writings of the Greek scholars, as well as in Jewish and Christian writings. The golden rule's phrase "as you would have them do to you" implies eventual reciprocity: be nice to the enemy long enough, and the enemy will become a friend. But verse 35 repeats Jesus' initial order to "love your enemies" and now adds on the disappointing "expecting nothing." There is, however, an explanation of sorts for why this loving behavior should be carried out. Jesus is urging us to be like God, to be "children of the Most High." For God's own mysterious reasons, God is "kind to the ungrateful and the wicked." Jesus does not try to give any rationale for this divine eccentricity. God is God, and God will do what God will do. Jesus calls us to imitate God's penchant for meting out unmerited mercies and love. Luke follows this mandate with the 'judge not' commands in verses 37-38) It is a natural conclusion of the message. Jesus reminds us not to judge others. Not judging is a part of that mercy God showers down upon the just and unjust. Not judging is another imitation of God. Furthermore, the parallelism Luke has been striving for in all his examples continues to be played out. Just as Luke has provided 3 examples of self-centered, graceless behavior, he now offers 3 examples of merciful behavior: do not judge; do not condemn; and do forgive.

The final image furthers the notion of God's outrageous graciousness. The "good measure" of God's grace we may normally expect is not what God wants to offer. In an agricultural economy, the fairness of weights and measures was a deeply serious matter. While no merchants wanted to be caught cheating with their scales, neither would they 'press down' or 'shake together' a measurement in order to ensure customers a maximum amount for their money. I'm reminded of the warning on cereal boxes that are only half full: "Contents may have settled during shipment." Which just means "we didn't put a lot in there in the first place!"

But God does not find even these actions beneficial enough. In God's extravagance, the 'good measure' is poured out until it is 'running over,' spilling over the sides of the measuring device and filling the robe-pocket or 'lap' of the receiver. This is what God wants to pour out to us, Jesus declares, and tells us we are to offer the same to others. (adapted from HOMILETICS ONLINE, Jan-Feb 2022, p 8-9)

OK, so how does this help us in our own lives? My second of only 2 points! Some of you may have seen the 1991 movie CITY SLICKERS, starring Billy Crystal. In a quirky way it was a wonderfully moral film, focusing on 3, middle-aged men from New York City who were dealing with midlife crisis. They have some serious conversations, trying to sort through their own struggles with aging and the larger mysteries of life.

One day they are discussing sex, and one of the 3, Ed, the character with the least amount of moral scruples, asks the other 2 whether they would be unfaithful to their wives and have an affair if they were sure that they would never be caught. Billy Crystal's character, Mitch, initially engages the question jokingly, protesting its impossibility: "You always get caught! All affairs get exposed in the end." But Ed persists with his question: "But suppose you wouldn't get caught. Suppose you could get away with it. Would you cheat on your wife and have an affair, if no one would ever know?" Mitch's answer: "No, I still wouldn't do it!" "Why not?" asks Ed, "nobody would know." "But I'd know," Mitch replied, "and I'd hate myself for it!"

There are volumes of moral wisdom in that answer. Ultimately nobody gets away with anything. We always get caught, not least by ourselves and by the moral energy inside the air we breathe. Moreover, whether we get caught or not, there will always be consequences. This is a deep, inalienable moral principle written into the very fabric of the universe. Universal human experience attests to this. Nobody ultimately gets away with anything, despite our protest to the contrary.

We see this articulated, for example, in the very heart of Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, and virtually all Eastern religions in a concept that is popularly called the Law of Karma. Karma is a Sanskrit word which means

action or deed, but it carries with it the implication that every action or deed we do generates a force of energy that returns to us in kind, namely, what we sow is what we will reap. Hence, bad intent and bad actions will ricochet back on us and cause unhappiness, just as good intent and good actions will ricochet back on us and bring us happiness, irrespective of what is seen or known by anyone else. The universe has its own laws that assure this.

Jesus obviously understood this. It is everywhere present in His teachings and at times explicitly stated, as in today's gospel. "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 the measure with which you measure will in turn be measured out to you." (Lk 6:38)

In essence, Jesus is telling us that the air we breathe out is the air that we will re-inhale and that this is true at every level of our existence: Simply put, if we breathe out bitterness, we will eventually find ourselves breathing in bitterness. If we breathe out dishonesty, we will eventually find ourselves breathing in dishonesty. If we breathe out greed and stinginess, we will eventually find ourselves grasping for generosity in a world suffocating on greed and stinginess. Conversely, if we breathe out generosity, love, honesty, and forgiveness, we will eventually, no matter how mean and dishonest the world around us may be, find life inside a world of generosity, love, honesty and forgiveness. If we want to see what this looks like in the flesh – we have all seen it – in someone who presides at this altar on a somewhat regular basis. No, it ain't me – I'm still too immature. It's Msgr. John Wall. I've called him the male version of Auntie Mame for years. No matter what struggle he might be going through, he always pronounces things 'wonderful,' 'lovely,' 'fantastic.' And he treats everyone with the same kindness and goodness. John is simply a great example of how to serve and give with joy --and make the world a better place.

What we breathe out is what we will eventually re-inhale. This is a nonnegotiable truth written into the very structure of the universe, written into life itself, written into every religion worthy of the name, written into the teachings of Jesus, and written into every conscience that operates in good faith.

Where does this principle ground itself and why can it never be violated without consequence? God has created a universe that is moral in its very structure. As Martin Luther King, Jr., once said, "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it always bends toward justice."

Being moral or not is not something we can choose or not choose. We don't have the prerogative because God created a morally-contoured universe, one that has deep, inalienable grooves which need to be honored and respected, irrespective of whether we get caught or not. Amen (last part adapted from Ronald Rolheiser, "The Law of Karma," August 4, 2014)