

**Luke 6: 27-36**  
**Counter-Cultural Faith**

This passage from Luke contains some of Jesus' most famous words. Most of them – including the famous command 'Love your enemies' – are counter-intuitive, unusual, and even baffling. This is not a mistake but quite deliberate. Jesus is not teaching us the wisdom of the world in this passage, but the wisdom of heaven, and the laws and morals of the Kingdom of God. In the world we live by one code of morals. Yet in the Kingdom, we are called to live by another.

This is made clear by the passage that comes immediately before this, Luke's account of the Beatitudes. We read:

Then he [Jesus] looked up at his disciples and said:

'Blessed are you who are poor,  
for yours is the kingdom of God.

<sup>21</sup> 'Blessed are you who are hungry now,  
for you will be filled.

'Blessed are you who weep now,  
for you will laugh.

<sup>22</sup> 'Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. <sup>23</sup> Rejoice on that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.

<sup>24</sup> 'But woe to you who are rich,  
for you have received your consolation.

<sup>25</sup> 'Woe to you who are full now,  
for you will be hungry.

'Woe to you who are laughing now,  
for you will mourn and weep.

<sup>26</sup> 'Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.

In this passage, Jesus draws a contrast between what is valued by God and what is valued by the world, and following from it, what will be rewarded by God in the future and what will be rejected by God.

Jesus has come to show his disciples where true life is found. It is not found in wealth, or prestige, or fame, or being seen as smart or noble in the eyes of others. Instead, it is found in the love of God and in the love of neighbour.

Yet this is a love which – in this world - entails *sacrifice*. We must forfeit some things in order to win others. We must surrender the things that the world covets in order to gain the things that God values. As such, the radical changes in behaviour that Jesus commands here do not come from nowhere. In our own strength they are difficult or impossible to achieve, and even harder to maintain. The only way in which we can

abandon these lesser loves is by knowing a greater love, the love of God, the love 'which moves the sun and the other stars of heaven' (Dante).

This text – and Lorna's message – challenge us to consider whether our faith really makes a difference in our day to day lives, or whether we are just like everyone else. Jesus' life and message are *radical* – are we?

### The Text

<sup>27</sup> 'But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, <sup>28</sup> bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. <sup>29</sup> 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. <sup>30</sup> Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. <sup>31</sup> Do to others as you would have them do to you.

<sup>32</sup> 'If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. <sup>33</sup> If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. <sup>34</sup> 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. <sup>35</sup> 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. <sup>36</sup> Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

1. Read the text to yourself. What words, phrases or commands of Jesus jump out at you? Why?
2. Can you think of a time when an 'enemy' did good to you, or you did good to an 'enemy'?
3. 'Love your enemies.' On a human level, is this possible? If not, how might you get to a place where it becomes easier to love your enemies? What ideas or experiences or gifts would you need to have in your life to make this possible?
4. "If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same." What point is Jesus making here? How do you respond to it?
5. Jesus' teaching here is counter-cultural in any age. Do you think of your faith as being 'counter-cultural'? Is this a helpful or unhelpful idea?
6. Activity: make three columns on a piece of paper. In the first one, write 'Bad things'; in the second 'Natural reaction'; in the third 'Jesus' reaction' (based on this text and similar ones). Think of some bad things that happen in life (insults, betrayal, being ignored etc) and enter this in the lefthand column. Then fill out the two columns that explore different reactions to it. You can do this as an individual or as a group. How does Jesus' reaction differ from the natural reaction?