

Luke 6:27-38. "But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. ²⁹ If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. ³⁰ Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. ³¹ Do to others as you would have them do to you. ³² "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them. ³³ And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' do that. ³⁴ And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' lend to 'sinners,' expecting to be repaid in full. ³⁵ But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. ³⁶ Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. ³⁷ "Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. ³⁸ 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 with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

Listen and Love

Your ears and your mouth are more connected than you often think about. If you have ever had a sore throat your ears will feel uncomfortable as the swelling and the infection fills up your throat. If your ear hurts, it often causes irritation to trickle down into the throat, causing sneezing and coughing. One affects the other, and because of this, there is a miserable feeling that spreads throughout the whole head and throughout the whole body. On the other hand, when an infected throat is treated and healed it will bring relief to the throat, the head, the ears, and to the whole body.

Your ears and your mouth are more connected than you might think. What are you listening to lately? What is coming into your ears that might soon be leaving your lips, and affecting the way that you speak and act toward others?

All around us, there is a blaring culture of outrage, animosity, conflict, and hatred; and this culture excels in filling our ears with voices of retribution, revenge, and retaliation. Lines are being drawn, sides are being taken, and verbal shots are being volleyed from all angles. Ethnic tensions, political pressure points, social and economic divides are being used as common excuses for people to attack others in a thunderous avalanche of anger and conflict and hatred. News reports are riddled with crimes of hatred and plots of violence. Social media and mainstream media avenues are overrun by everyday overtones of hostility. It rushes at us from every angle. This widespread spewing out of outrage and hate not only clogs our ears, but it has this infectious ability to rush into our souls and cling on to our human nature. And all this can lead to miserable results within us and outside of us as that anger festers and clogs and builds up and irritates until it erupts in words coughed up in ugly bursts from our own mouths. This in turn only causes these feelings of

hostility to spread and infect others. As sinful human beings, who among us doesn't have an urge for vengeance? Who doesn't want to get back at people who may have caused offense, or harm, or even inconvenience? How easily we can be swept away when countless voices are crying out for us to give in to our base and sinful instincts!

Our ears and our mouth, and our hearts and our lives are connected much more than we might think about. What are you listening to lately? What is coming into your ears, what soon might be leaving your lips? It is not so far fetched to think if conflict and anger and enmity fill our ears on a daily basis it may soon easily spill out of our mouths and into our lives.

And so today, we again take time to breathe in the refreshing, healing, the saving words of Jesus as he speaks in a very different tone than the world around us. As Jesus speaks these words take note of what he says, ***But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies.*** Note the order. Hear Jesus and love. Listen and Love. Listen to the still small voice of your Savior that speaks words that rise above the noise of every generation. He speaks in a way that is so counter to the culture that surrounds us, as he speaks of loving your neighbor as yourself, showing kindness to those who may not seem to deserve mercy. His words stand out, as he speaks of a practical golden rule of treating others as we would wish to be treated, but he also includes words that challenge and stretch our understanding of kindness. Love your enemies. Turn the other cheek. Be abundantly generous, even to those who hurt or take from you. Stand out in this world of hostility as you live lives of love and uncommon kindness. *Anyone can be kind to those who are kind to you. Anyone can give and be generous to those from whom they expect something in return. But you, love your enemies and do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back.*

Jesus goes on to speak words of kindness and love which warm, and melt, and expand our hearts so that they break through the icy grip of hatred. Jesus words speaks these words of kindness and love so that each of us may burst forth with the new life and love that he gives to us. For his words speak of the incredible mercy that he has shown to us. Take a deep breath and listen to his words of uncommon love. ***But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to those the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.*** His powerful word not only reforms our behavior, but it crucifies and buries our instincts of hatred. The old self is daily left behind, and now rooted in his mercy we are reborn to live as children mercy, children of the Most High, and to bring forth fruits of his love. He was kind to you and me who are so often ungrateful and wicked. He was merciful to you who were dead in sin and an enemy of God. He saved us and redeemed us when we had nothing to offer to him, nothing to give. But the Savior does it all for us. He saves. He speaks. He brings life and healing and salvation and daily transformation. Through his word, he speaks to you. He lovingly speaks this truth that penetrates your hearts and fills up your lungs. You are forgiven, now breathe out words of forgiveness to others. You are no longer condemned enemies of God, you are children of mercy, children of the Most High God. The Lord, your Father, has forgiven you, therefore, ***Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.***

With ears and hearts, lungs and lips, throat and mouth, filled with his mercy, we are made new, forgiven and set free to live a life as God's children. Our Father speaks to us with words of forgiveness and mercy, and he raises us up to live lives of forgiveness and mercy. He raises us up to forgive and be generous, to rebuke but not judge, to speak and act with concern and kindness; in doing so we breathe out the very mercy that God has breathed into to us. We listen to his outstanding love and we love in ways that stand out.

As Christian parents and grandparents, we must admit that we fall short of setting a righteous example for our children. Instead of standing out we fit in much too well with the common culture of hostility that is so prevalent around us. We give little thought to what we take in throughout the day and how easily it flows in our thoughts, our conversations, or even affects our disposition; We get carried away with the passionate discussions we hear on the radio, see on TV, or participate in on social media. And soon our words and actions spread like the common cold and fill up the eyes and ears of our little ones with that gunk that is being spread around. We get caught up in that culture of hostility and we speak and say things that do not fall on deaf ears but are soaked up and imitated.

Whatever our age, we are also children of habit who are sinfully good at practicing selective hearing. We pick up on the bad habits and the harsh words. We get heated and angered all too easily as we invite or allow the voices of hatred and anger and conflict to fill our ears. We might even feel a bit protected and somehow secure as we find a place in the crowd, a place in this culture of outrage that is sweeping through our nation and through the world. The life-giving words of Jesus too often become nothing more than mere background noise. As we fail to tune in and listen to Jesus words, we also fail to dial in on how we might speak words of love, show others kindness, or love and forgive others as Jesus has loved and forgiven us.

Thankfully we have a Heavenly Father who is patient with us. In his unfailing love, he sends his Son to show us the mercy we do not deserve. In his abounding grace, he daily speaks words of kindness that are brought to our attention again and again. Thanks be to God that he has given us Christian parents and grandparents, who may not have been perfect, but they taught us the golden rule, they modeled Christian love, they taught us how to apologize and forgive. And in many cases that came from breathing in and listening to the uncommon kindness and love of the LORD our God found in the words of God. The Bible shows us how, in love, God created us. It reveals how he delights our lives with beauty, daily giving us undeserved and abundant gifts from his hand, and in his great love, he sent his Son into this world to save sinners. In love for those who were by nature enemies of God, the Son of God came, to give his life to save us. And before he would lay down his life in love, he would speak of love in ways that cause us to pause. And we are drawn in to listen to that which is so wonderfully different, for it comes straight from our divine and gracious and generous LORD. He is a God of mercy, of undeserved grace, who changes us from those who are hostile to God and to each other, into children of mercy.

The next time you find yourself listening to the angry hostile words of the culture of outrage, stop and consider the counter-cultural words of Jesus. ***Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.*** The next time you reach for your phone to attack or clap back at a person with an

opposing view on social media, put down the phone, and back away, fold your hands, bow your head, and pray. Pray for the those who hate you, and as you pray ask that God would bless these people. Pray to God that they would come into contact with his words of truth, his message of uncommon grace and mercy, and the light and warmth of this message of Christ's mercy would change their hearts, For he who has the power to condemn and judge also has the power to save, to transform, to bring forth uncommon and unexpected fruits of faith from hearts and lives dead in sin and death. Pray for your enemies. May we do so within our family circles at home, and also here as a family of believers.

Our God, in his great mercy, has not treated us as our sins deserved, instead, he has loved ungrateful and wicked people from the beginning. God promised a Savior to the very people who broke and ruined and infected his creation. And God's own Son would come, and he would give his life for the wicked, the ungrateful, for sinners like you and me. He who died to pay for the sins of even those that killed him, would speak words of forgiveness and grace from the very instrument of his death. The one who spoke of uncommon kindness would die in unforgettable love so that we would be forgiven. By his grace he came so that we would know and speak and sing of his boundless love forever. This is the very character and essence of our God and Savior. Throughout his word, throughout his life, through his teaching, the love God is abundantly evident in Christ Jesus.

As our ears are filled with this good news of Jesus as we breathe in the Father's mercy we are filled to overflowing. Therefore, we will we breathe it out in our prayers and sing of God's praise. We will speak forgiveness and show mercy to each other, and as our lips speak this incredible culture of love and forgiveness to each other; generous fruits of faith will be evident. Planted by Jesus' words of mercy and grace, mercy and grace will grow in our lives. Not only does God show us his abundant mercy by forgiving us and teaching us to forgive, but he also challenges us that as we live lives of forgiveness and mercy those same blessings will stand out in our lives, they will impact the lives of those around us, and they may even be returned to us. ³⁷ ***"Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. ³⁸ 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 with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."***

In a culture in which hostility flow so freely in through the ears and out through the mouth, what an outstanding and very different culture the LORD Jesus creates and calls us into. Uncommon and generous love and mercy are poured out and running over. Mercy measured about and abundantly poured into our lives, God's love is spoken for our ears to hear, our hearts to fill, and our mouths to speak.

Thanks be to God, for this good news of mercy and grace that fills our ears, that brightens our days, and brings forth words of kindness. Thanks be to God that through faith in Jesus Christ our lives abound with his uncommon mercy as we give praise to God and show love to others. Our ears, our hearts, our mouths, our lives are blessed as they are all connected to his gracious Word. Give thanks to God that he speaks of his uncommon love to us and through us, and we are refreshed and made new as we live for him. Amen.