

Sermon  
Epiphany 7-C  
St. Andrew's, Methuen  
February 20, 2022  
William Bradbury

Genesis 45:3-11, 15  
Psalm 37:1-12, 41-42  
1 Corinthians 15:35-38,42-50  
Luke 6:27-38

"Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven."

We know full well what it means to bear the image of the man of dust when we receive the ashes and hear the words: "Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return."

As our bodies let us down, we experience our dust-nature in small and in ultimate ways.

We also know what it's like to experience this dust-nature in our broken emotional lives, in which small moments lodge in our psyches producing large explosions.

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What we don't know as well is what it is to bear the image of the man from heaven until we are encountered by Jesus, the first fully human being. **Jesus doesn't take life from others to protect his dust-nature, but offers his dust-nature as a conduit for the Life of God to flow to those around him.**

Paul writes: "The First Adam, became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving—**life-giving--spirit**"

The purpose of your life and mine is to make the journey from being someone who takes life in order to survive into being someone who gives life in order that others can know Life in God.

On the cross Jesus is the most powerful life-giver the world has ever seen. The Gospel of John tells us that blood and water pour out of Jesus's side when he is pierced by the spear—Christ's life flowing out to the world.

**But even before the cross we see Jesus's life-giving nature:**

Luke 6:19 says: "all the crowd sought to touch him, **for power came out from him** and healed them all."

**Jesus comes to teach us how to join him in being a life-giver.**

Life-takers are always on the defensive, ready to react against the insults of others, but as Fred Craddock says, "Jesus offers no instruction to **followers who would strike, steal, hate, curse, and abuse** others because such is not kingdom behavior. But to those who are vulnerable and likely recipients of the world's abuse, **Jesus gave teachings on how not to be a victim: take charge of your life and the situation by taking the initiative in loving, caring, giving.**"

Jesus teaches: "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. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you."

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**Jesus the first fully human being invites us to practice life-giving.**  
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**Most churches** I know have listened to Jesus when he tells them to be life-givers by feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and tending the sick.

**But very few churches** are ready for today's the Master Class on being Life-Givers, so he begins this difficult teaching by saying: "**I say to you that listen**". That is, this teaching is for those with sufficient conscious separation from the ego that they are willing to surrender to God's work in their lives. Those who want not just a healthy body, but the Mind of Christ; those open to experiencing the thrill of giving away one's life for others. In short, those thirsting for union with God.

**Eugene Peterson translates this opening line in The Message as: "To you who are ready for the truth, I say this."**

**Because if we're not ready for the truth** what follows will make absolutely no sense, which is why most Christians don't even pretend to obey Jesus when he says, "**Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you....**" and in case we missed it the first time he says once again at the end, "**But love your enemies....**"

**Jesus teaches life-giving because God is life-giving. And Jesus says, therefore, "Be merciful even as your Father is merciful."**

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 "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."  
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**Notice also: To act as a life-giver toward people we don't like is to make a radical stand for our own freedom. When we spend our lives reacting negatively to the negativity of others, then we are having our character shaped by what others do to us. We are being trained, like a puppy, to fetch the bone of anger every time someone throws it our way. This isn't freedom, but slavery.**

**Jesus wants us shaped and formed, not by the bad behavior of others, but by the merciful behavior of God.**  
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A number of years ago my nephew James and I visited the Civil Rights Museum in Atlanta. At one exhibit James and I sit at a small lunch counter and through headphones we hear the taunts and attacks of our enemies, who do not want Blacks having lunch at Woolworth's in Greensboro, NC in February 1960.

The first emotion I feel is fear: I'm not used to being yelled at and threatened. The second thing I feel is anger and the desire to fight back.

The Black college students receiving that abuse, however, had been trained not to succumb to either fear or anger:

Martin Luther King addressed them on February 16, 1960:

"May I say to you as you continue your protest, you will confront moments of difficulty.... But....Let us not fear going to jail. If the officials threaten to arrest us for standing up for our rights, we must answer by saying **that we are willing and prepared to fill up the jails of the South**. Maybe it will take this willingness to stay in jail to arouse the dozing conscience of our nation....

Let us avoid not only **external physical violence** but also **internal violence of the spirit**. We can build an empire depending on Love. In that way, we may be able **to not only teach ourselves something**, but we may be able also **to teach others something**.... All the darkness in the world cannot obscure the light of a single candle."  
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The best reason to go to church is to **walk with Christ into ever-deepening personal experiences of God, who "is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked."**

If we want peace in our hearts and peace in our world we must take the Master Class Jesus teaches entitled, "How to love your enemies."

Where Christ shows us how to act like "children of the Most High"

Where Christ leads us from **being life-takers who are addicted to fear, anger, and retaliation**, to being life-givers who are “merciful, as God is merciful.”