

Epiphany 7C'19
24 February 2019
Luke 6.27-38
St. Luke's Episcopal Church
North Little Rock, Arkansas
The Rev. Carey Stone

For human beings this is impossible, but with God, all things are possible: In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Mr. Carson was the butler, and an older bachelor, and Mrs. Hughes was the housekeeper, and a spinster on the TV series, Downton Abbey. Throughout the series they play a several year game of cat and mouse until finally in the last season they get married. They each had never been married so those early days of marriage turned out to be somewhat of an adventure for them.

One of their conflicts centered around the issue of cooking. Now Carson was known for his strict standards but Mrs. Hughes had no idea what she was in for when it came to the proper techniques for cooking various dishes. Mrs. Hughes could never seem to get it right, either the meat was too rare, or the glaze sauce had not been heated to the appropriate temperature, it was always something. Finally, the cook at the abbey, Mrs. Patmore recommended that Mrs. Hughes develop a “condition” with her hand where she would simply be unable to cook for several days. She told Mr. Carson that she expected him to cook but not to worry she would give him good directions. When he would become exasperated Mrs. Hughes would tell him “not to worry” that cooking was easy. By about the second or third

meal he had burned himself, burned the food, cut his hand, and was in a total state of anxiety. The armchair chef had discovered what real life was like in the kitchen and found out that cooking, at least for him, was an impossible job! Mrs. Hughes was filled with glee when he threw in his chef's towel, and was more than ready to take back over the cooking duties.

I was in a parishioner's kitchen this week and we somehow got on the subject of the Sunday sermon and the gospel reading. I took out my phone and opened my bible app and started to read from Luke and the more I read the greener their skin got, and the sicker my stomach started to feel. Listen again to Jesus' sermon:

“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also. If someone takes away your coat give them your shirt also...If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you?” There's more but that's probably enough for now. I mentioned that someone had turned green and I got a sick feeling in my stomach when we read it, how about you? How are you feeling? Are you feeling good about yourself because you are doing all those things Jesus mentions or do feel a little sick? When we come down into the valley where everyone else is struggling and we listen to Jesus' “Sermon on the Plain” we realize that we all fall

short. As we reflect on our lives, do we find ourselves like Mr. Carson, with an impossible task? Why would Jesus give us an impossible task?

In the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous we learn about a way of life that is based upon the gospel and is good way for any person to live a godly life. The first very first step states: “*We admitted we were powerless over Alcohol (or fill in the blank with what your struggle is) and that our lives had become unmanageable.*” We humans trying to live with only our own wits and our own resources are powerless to live the life that Jesus describes and desires for us.

Step 2 says: “*Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.*” When you look at our world today insanity is not too strong of a word to describe it. For a great description for insanity let’s turn Jesus’ sermon around backwards: ‘*Hate your enemies, seek revenge on those who hate you, curse back those who curse you, cast a spell over those who abuse you. If somebody hits you, hit them back even harder, if somebody takes your coat then steal something from them to even up the score. When you give make sure and give it to somebody who can give something back to you. Make sure to Love, appreciate, and hang out only with those who love you back.*’ Well, you get the picture. This is how the majority of people live and it’s insane.

Step 3 of the 12 steps says: *“Made a decision to turn our will and our life over to the care of God as we understood God.”* Only when we give up, and say *“you know what, I can’t do this Jesus, at least not on my own.”* Now we have access to the abundant love and abundant life of God. Now there is no longer scarcity but there will be enough no matter how dire our circumstances may seem. When wrong is done to us, we get out of the way and let the God who says *“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do”* deal with them. As the Church in the world we are called to live life differently, to let our lights shine brightly. The world quickly loses interest in us when we live the way of insanity. As someone once told me, *“I have enough stress in my life already why come to church where there’s more.”* It doesn’t have to be that way, we don’t have to live that way.

There is a powerful story about how to live out Jesus’ sermon, it’s called *Les Misérables* or (Le Miz) as it is sometimes referred to and it’s a novel written by Victor Hugo. There are a couple of musical versions and a movie based on the novel. It’s set during the time of the French revolution when the country is in great turmoil and the main character is a poor man by the name of Jean Valjean. With poverty and unemployment at an all-time high and Valjean struggling to feed his

starving family he breaks into a bakery and steals a loaf of bread. He is caught, tried, and convicted and is sentenced to 19 years hard labor in a French prison.

Upon his release he attempts to find lodgings but because he is a convict no one will give him a place to stay. Finally, he knocks on the door of the church and a bishop comes to the door. He gives him a meal and a bed for the night. In the wee hours of the morning Valjean creeps into the dining room and starts bagging all the silver. The bishop hears the noise gets up and catches him red handed and Valjean knocks him to the ground and runs.

Later in the day the authorities captured Valjean and they brought him to the church and they show the bishop the silver utensils. They indicated that Valjean had told them the bishop had given the silver to him. The bishop doesn't hesitate and says, "Yes I did," and then added that he was angry with Valjean and asks him why he didn't also take the two silver candelabras because they would have brought an even higher price on the street. The authorities release Valjean and leave. The bishop puts his hands on Valjean's shoulders looks him in the eye and says, "*Don't ever forget you have promised to become a new man. Jean Valjean my brother, you no longer belong to evil. With this silver I have bought your soul,*

I've ransomed you from fear, and hatred, and now I give you back to God."¹ Such mercy, such grace, such compassion, like he had never known before. Jean Valjean was transformed that day by God because a bishop was willing to live the gospel that truly is good news, not a graceless list of impossible rules but a living, relationship of love. When we turn our wills and our lives over to the care of God, the impossible becomes possible, there will be more than enough, there will be an abundant life where God does for us what we cannot do for ourselves. Amen!

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