

Seventh Week

1 Samuel 26:1-25 1 Corinthians 15: 45-49 Luke 6: 27-38

How should a Christian community live its life?

Jesus speaks to the group who have recognised the voice of the prophet and have put aside the old life. He now presents the key message that will provide the ethical framework for the community.

Luke presents Jesus as the teacher of a new morality for a new people. Four directives provide a framework for the new way.

Love all; not a select few, not those who will be useful for your advancement, not those society or church approve of, but everyone, particularly those who may be regarded as enemies.

Do good towards all; be steadfast in acting well on behalf of others. Don not be put off by those who don't like you or may try to sabotage your efforts.

Bless those who curse you. They will probably not do it overtly so do not allow antagonistic feelings towards you block the good you are engaged in.

Pray for those who harm you, in whatever manner. Do not retaliate. Meet violence, whether physical, mental or emotional with the gentleness of the heart of Christ.

The first two precepts are about our catholicity. God's love is universal. Love-in-action is for all.

The second pair of precepts governs our attitudes to violence. Holiness calls for a heart which is single-minded in its' quest of the unity of peoples.

Those who strive to follow this way can rightly be called "children of the Most High".

These standards are very high and the gospel is good news when people see these godly standards reflected in the community.

A recurring refrain is that the behaviour of the disciple is to be at a different level from the ordinary reasonable person. The new way exceeds the demands of the basic morality of the ancient commandments. These were considered the minimum required for a stable community.

The new call is to transform relationships between people, whether locally or globally. This is what it means to be Christ-like, Christened.

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The chapter from the book of Samuel reads like an adventure story. It shows David, the hero, doing a good and honourable thing in sparing the life of his King. For us, a key sentence in the light of the Gospel is, "don not harm him, for who can lay hands on the Lord's anointed and remain unpunished?"

Christians believe that all people are the anointed of God. No one person is of more worth than another. Therefore we are not permitted to bring harm to another. Punishment, if it is required, belongs to God.

This is also the stark message of Genesis 4:10-16. Having killed his brother Cain now believes that anyone is free to exact revenge. "Not so!" says God. "If anyone kills Cain, Cain will be avenged sevenfold." So the Lord marked Cain as his own.

We all carry the mark of God so no one has the right to vengeance. Christian people, as a whole, have not come to terms with a non-violent approach to life. Resurrection is the call to strive to live at a higher plane than the simply natural. As the sage says, "Without a vision the people perish." Our vision is to try to live in right relationships with all peoples in the cosmos.

It will take a real consistent effort to erase the violent vocabulary from our religious language. If we see ourselves as engaged "in spiritual warfare" , for example, then we will see others as enemy, and if enemy, then expendable.

Jesus has put before us a way that seems too idealistic. Transformation comes from the attitude of heart we have traditionally called conversion or repentance. To renew our efforts to live as followers of Jesus, the face of many failures is real heroism. This is the faithfulness that has run as a stream of godliness throughout all of our scriptures.

As "the sun has a splendour of its own", so do we as splinters of light from the Son