

Luke 6:27-38/Feb. 20, 2022

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

So, everyone knows Aristotle, right? Well – you’ve heard of him. I doubt anyone here is old enough to have known him personally.

He was a Greek philosopher who predated Jesus’ birth, God’s incarnation, by more than 300 years and who has had a lasting impact on how we think about thinking all the way up until this very day.

One of the things that Aristotle said was – what you see is what you get. Well – not exactly, but that’s the general idea behind his statement that actuality comes before potentiality. The actual decides the potential.

Basically, you can’t get something out of nothing. If it doesn’t already exist, it can never exist. That’s logical, right. That’s the idea behind evolution. You can’t get blood out of a turnip, because turnips don’t make blood. That’s not what they do. It doesn’t flow, if you will, but slowly things can change, like cows that once weighed 200 pounds can now weigh well over a thousand.

Based on this idea, Aristotle said that the gods acted once in the beginning and all actuality has come from that one act in the distant past. The one act brought about our actuality, and there is nothing we can do about it, which is kind of defeatist, isn’t it?

But, based on this idea, Aristotle said that love can only flow toward God. He said that God cannot love, because love is only directed at the one who acted in the beginning. God doesn’t love. We can only love God.

Now – this is where all of us Christians, and Jews for that matter, should gasp and start throwing things. God doesn’t love? That’s preposterous, right? Our basic tenet in Christianity is that God definitely does love us! That’s the whole reason Jesus came to be with us. To be and proclaim God’s love!

And so here in Luke 6 we see Aristotle and Jesus going head to head.

Aristotle says – what you see is what has always been. This is the way things are, because they have always been that way.

So, when someone hits you, you hit them back. When someone steals from you, you steal from them. When someone sells you into slavery, like what happened to Joseph, you get revenge. When someone curses you, you curse them back. What has been is what will be.

It's like being on a train track that you cannot get off of. And if you know the Greek creation stories, you know that they were filled with violence, with the gods fighting with one another and behaving horribly.

In the midst of that kind of logic, Jesus yells – Stop! Stop! That is not the truth and that is not the way it is to be among his followers, because God is the Creator who continually creates out of love, and takes what we have and transforms it into a new reality, a new creation.

In the Judeo/Christian understanding, God created all that exists out of love, because God was looking for companions. God wants to be in relationship with us, not just worshipped. At God's core is relationship - Father Son Holy Spirit. So, created in God's image, we are created to be in relationship with God and one another.

In Genesis, Joseph's brothers sell him into slavery, breaking their relationship. They meant it for ill, but God turned their jealousy into a saving act. Through the brother's evil, Jacob's family was saved from a famine, and when Joseph realizes that, he forgives his brothers. Joseph and his brothers, who had hated him, are reconciled with one another through Joseph's act of forgiveness. That's how Genesis ends. That's how the story ends, with reconciliation.

When Jesus enters the scene, we see a continuation of God's will for reconciliation in the world, which is the opposite of what the people are experiencing.

Jesus is crucified by the religious leaders who were threatened by him, who were jealous of him, but his death didn't bring about more death. On the contrary. On the third day, Jesus rose from the dead in the ultimate act of forgiveness, and a new reality was realized for all who were drawn to him, because God loves us continually, not just once, and when we respond to that love, God's creating action continues in restored relationships.

If what you see is what you get, then clearly we are doomed.

Based on our past, we can never love God enough. All we seem to do is bring about war and violence, and so we need a Savior. We need someone to bring us healing, and only God can do that. Only God can bring about reconciliation and peace. Only God can change the story, and so God does, over and over again, every time we forgive and are forgiven.

And because it is impossible for us to earn our own salvation, God makes it impossible. God changes the story and creates a new reality. Earning our salvation is taken off the table. Instead God just gives it to us freely.

So, you'll notice in Luke 6:31, Jesus says – Do to others as you would have them do to you – as you would have them do to you. It's not – Do unto others as they have already done to you. No. It is – Do to others as you would have done to you. And that's exactly what God does in Jesus Christ, our Lord, Savior, and Healer.

Jesus invites us to follow him and see ourselves in other people, just as God sees God's self in us. In Christ, God is born to us, lives and dies among us, and then is resurrected for us. God changes our story. Instead of an eye for an eye, there is forgiveness and reconciliation. A new reality. And God invites us to bring that new creation into reality here and now.

As you and I know, our actions speak louder than our words, so it is our actions that will make God's will known in the world. Our Christ-like actions are what make God's will actual in the world. Through the Holy Spirit, we are Christ's hands, feet, and mouths in the world bringing the act of resurrection into the actuality of our daily lives.

Aristotle said that the gods were the unmovable first movers, but we know that God is still moving here and now, and that brings hope to a fearful world, because God is continually creating out of love for us and what has been in the past, which is death, does not define our future, which is resurrection.

And so Jesus calls us to follow him and love one another as we would want to be loved, as Jesus himself has loved us. Go out into the world and show the world that what we see is not what we will get. God is working today for a new future, and we can live that future now by transforming all that happens into good news – like Joseph seeing how his imprisonment saved his family – like Jesus' death restoring our relationship with God.

Treat others as you would treat yourself. When we treat others with love, in spite of what they have done to us, we are participating in God's amazing work in and for the world, because God is continuing to act here and now through the Holy Spirit working in us.

What has been is not what will be, because God transforms death into resurrection, and sometimes we have to die to ourselves for there to be a life giving relationship. As Luther said, God created out of nothing, and as long as we are nothing, God can create out of us as well. When we put our ego aside, God creates through us.

So, when we do something wrong, we humble ourselves and apologize. And, when someone hurts us, we swallow our pride and tell the other person that we are hurt. We do these things so that we can be reconciled and stay in relationship.

This does not mean, however, that we stay in abusive relationships. God never wants us in abusive relationships, because God loves us and only wants love for us.

If you are in an abusive relationship, there is help. I will help you get it and I will take you to a safe place. That's what I would have done for me, so that is what I will do for you.

What Jesus is asking us to do is to see ourselves in other people. That can be hard, but we pray for the Holy Spirit to help us. Sometimes the other person will not be able to see themselves in us, so we pray for them. We pray that God will break their hard hearts, so that we can be restored into love. We also pray that our own hearts will be softened towards our enemies, so that we can love that person in whatever way is possible.

The good news is that the past doesn't define the future. What has been will not always be. God is working here and now on a future not based on what we currently experience, but only on God's infinite love.

Thanks be to God. Amen.