**Homily for February 23 2025 Luke 6:27-38 “A Bushel and a Peck”**

*Jesus said, "I say to you that listen, 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; 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.**"If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.**"Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back."*

Today is a big day, my friends, here in sermon land. Today we cover a broad swath, from silly musical theatre songs to the deepest aspirations of the human race. The musical theatre aspect of our morning began in 1950; the biblical aspect is much, much older, but between these two perspectives we will find both the greatest challenge and the greatest reward of the Christian faith. Today is a big day, my friends, here in sermon land.

This notion of bushels and pecks which we will be alluding to this morning have agricultural roots, of course; these are *volume* measures, with the lowly peck being a quarter of a bushel. A full bushel and little more, right, like in the famous song from *Guys and Dolls*:

**I love you a bushel and a peck, a bushel and a peck and a hug around the neck;  
a hug around the neck and a barrel and a heap, a barrel and a heap**

**and I'm talkin' in my sleep about you, about you,**

**'cause I love you a bushel and a peck, you bet your purdy neck I do!**

Ah, to gush with love like a teenager again! The singer croons, I love you the full measure and then some, a bushel *and* a peck, a barrel *and* a heap, and let’s not forget that hug around the neck! Pause with me here in the silliness and let’s get all serious for a few minutes, and them come back, even as Luke brings us back to these volume measurements as they apply, not to apples or barley, but to love. How do you measure the volume of our love?

I am agonized to report that Jesus measures the volume of our love in the excruciatingly uncomfortable way we have just heard: *"I say to you that listen, 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; 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 back. Do to others as you would have them do to you.* He goes on, but how we wish he hadn’t, to discount our usual channels of love, family and friends and business associates, rightly stating that loving these folks is basic and common and not very remarkable as a measurement of the volume of our love.

This notion of loving our enemies has certainly gotten lost in translation over the centuries. Our Bible has been translated into English, of course, but was originally written in Greek and in Hebrew. And over the years you have brushed up against a few really important words from these languages. Two nouns come to mind: *agape* and *shalom*. These two related super-concepts describe the highest form of love for the Greeks, and the highest measure of peace for the Hebrews. And even though the Greeks have six specific forms of love, Jesus chose *agape,* the highest, most comprehensive form, to describe how he wishes us to relate to one another: enemies, abusers, haters, the whole vile lot, we are instructed to love them, and not just casually, but to love them with *agape* love. We’re in a wee bit deeper than a bushel and a peck, yes?

These famous nouns have active forms, of course, the verbs that describe the doing of them. Thus, *agape* is this high and holy love, and loving that way is verbalized as *agapao*. When Jesus says to love others, *agapao*, it’s a verb, not just an idea. Similarly, the Hebrew notion of well-being, prosperity, and the peace of completeness which we know as *shalom* is verbalized as *shalem*. Both of these verbs are united in this way: they mean to make something or someone unbroken. A ‘sneak peek’ at the finished product here: we don’t love our enemies because they deserve it, but to make them less broken and to move them along the path of wholeness.

So…this verb, *agapao*, doesn't emphasize the guarded meeting of two parties but rather their gradual integration, like a zipper that closes and becomes one interlocked thing. Unfortunately, there's no real equivalent of this Greek verb in the English language. And although Bible translators have uniformly translated this verb as "to love", I must stress that *agapao* describes *not* a static enthrallment *nor* a passionate fling, but a very long and gradual process of approach and merger. It takes two dissimilar things and makes them one, transforms them from broken to unbroken, from fractured to whole. This idea has the Holy Spirit’s fingerprints all over it! Both Luke’s verb *agapao* and the Hebrew kissing cousin *shalem* are frequently used in the context of relationships, indicating a state of being undivided or fully committed. In both ancient Greek and Hebrew cultures, the concept of completeness or wholeness was highly valued. Sorry, New-Agers didn’t invent that idea on their own! It was not only about physical or material completeness, but also about moral and spiritual integrity. The idea of being *shalem* was closely tied to living in accordance with God's laws and maintaining harmonious relationships with others, which would eventually bring us round to the familiar notion of *shalom.*

I think that this ‘love your enemies’ teaching has stuck in the craw of Christianity mostly because we have not understood it. Viewed as a straightforward moral highroad, a painful but needful duty, we seldom even try. But what if we understood, deeply, that the *agapao* of enemies would eventually *heal* them, slowly but inexorably *transforming* them into members of the beloved community rather than adversaries? In our anxiety and impatience we fail to see the long game, the really long game, that God is suggesting, not only for our redemption, but for the redemption of the world.

Jesus knew how counter-cultural this idea was. He had no illusions that this kind of living was easy, not at all. He tries to incentivize us with the volume measures we played with earlier, suggesting that the rewards of *agapao* would be like the bushel and the peck, the full measure plus a little more! How does he say it, again? *Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.**"Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back."* But the reward, as luscious as it may be, has never been enough to get most of us into an active *agapao* lifestyle. Heck, even the Broadway song understood that love is problematic:

**I love you a bushel and a peck, a bushel and a peck**

**though you make my heart a wreck, make my heart a wreck,**

**and you make my life a mess, make my life a mess, yes a mess of happiness…**

Friends, the truth that both Broadway and the Bible can agree upon is that *agape* and *shalom* are not easy; they are not tidy, they are not fast or efficient, they are not without setbacks. They are, nevertheless, God’s design for the redemption of Creation. Our world seems to want us to be like ripped-apart zippers, incomplete, sharp teeth exposed. But *agapao* and *shalem* are God’s zipper pulls, as gradually, tooth by tooth, we become reintegrated, one people, one family, one world. It will take a lot of love…at *least* a bushel and a peck, right? Amen.