



Lenten Study 2025: Being People of Peace & Justice

Last week we looked at grounding ourselves, using the words of the minor prophets Joel, Amos, and Micah to frame our response: That as people of faith, people of peace, people of action we have direction. We are not foundering when we remember who we have been called to be, and that is the first act of resistance.

This week we turn to the Sermon on the Plain. This is not really a sermon as the word is commonly used, but rather a teaching time combining several of the sayings and lessons of Jesus.

Too often it is taught as passive acceptance, or a belief that the situation we are in today won't be dealt with until after death in the unknowingness that is heaven. However that cannot possibly be the meaning since the Hebrew people, as well as Jewish people today, had no unifying understanding of the next world. Everything was to be worked out in this life.

Week 2: Passive Action

There are several lessons in the text about how to resist. And while "passive action" sounds like an oxymoron, it is not.

One of the things to remember is how oppressors want the oppressed to become like them, to become bitter and resigned. It makes manipulation much easier if the oppressed or objectified population does not see another way of being. That is the first of the passive actions: Simply recognizing that we are worthy.



The text starts with a list of four blessings for the poor/powerless and four woes for the rich/powerful. We have to be careful to not see this as an inversion of society, but rather as an evening of the playing field. The poor will finally have enough, and the rich must give up their excess. This is how we make a just society. Any society that caters to the rich at the expense of the poor is not in keeping with God's plan.

Second we have to understand the power of love and prayer.

Love, as it is spoken about in the Bible is not passionate "eros", but rather communal "agape". It is the simple act of wanting the basics for everyone, not just those we like or agree with. This includes wanting the best for those who try to oppress or abuse us.

Now, that does not mean we have to want the best for them within our own home, it just means we want the best for them wherever they are, with the hope that they will find satisfaction.

In connection to that is the action of prayer. So many dismiss prayer as simply saying words, but as Physics is now able to show us, the energy created in prayer not only multiplies, it can also be sent distances. If prayer is all we can do, that is enough. Prayer combined with action has the potential to enact incredible change.

Third is acts of kindness. Oppression and bullying often interpret acts of kindness as weakness, but the opposite is true. If we resist the urge to meet oppression in equal measures of negative behaviour, we are already reducing the power of oppression. Oppression counts on destroying community. Kindness shows strength of community. We can show graciousness without being the slightest bit blind to how someone acts.

The simple belief of “do to others as you would have them do to you”, is a statement of hope. It is rewriting the rules of engagement. You are behaving in a way that forces them to reassess their position. Negative behaviour is always uncertain of how to respond to kindness.

Fourth, don't look for perfection. This is a major fault in all progressive action, the urge to judge each other rather than focusing on the bigger problem. It is always easier to smash something than build, so oppressors have the easier job. But when we fight amongst ourselves about whose action is the proper action, whose commitment the truest commitment, we are essentially giving away victory and accepting defeat. We must not allow some misguided notion of our own perfection to derail the efforts.

And finally, remember where we stand. Chaos comes in waves, not all at once. And if we become unmoored we are less able to stand against the waves when they come. As people of the Christian faith we seek our solid base in the person of Jesus. Jesus was continually advocating for the poor and subjugated in the face of the power of institutional and governmental oppression. His very life, his actions, are places we can focus to keep us on the correct path towards resisting.

The Sermon on the Mount shows us that passive action looks like love, prayer, kindness, mutual encouragement, and forming alliances without judgement between like minded people. These are actions that everyone can take.



Our texts this week

Luke 6

- 20** Jesus looked at his disciples and said: God will bless you people who are poor. His kingdom belongs to you!
- 21** God will bless you hungry people. You will have plenty to eat! God will bless you people who are now crying. You will laugh!
- 22** God will bless you when others hate you and won't have anything to do with you. God will bless you when people insult you and say cruel things about you, all because you are a follower of the Son of Man. **23** Long ago your own people did these same things to the prophets. So when this happens to you, be happy and jump for joy! You will have a great reward in heaven.
- 24** But you rich people are in for trouble. You have already had an easy life!
- 25** You well-fed people are in for trouble. You will go hungry! You people who are laughing now are in for trouble. You are going to cry and weep!
- 26** You are in for trouble when everyone says good things about you. That is what your own people said about those prophets who told lies.
- 27** This is what I say to all who will listen to me: Love your enemies, and be good to everyone who hates you. **28** Ask God to bless anyone who curses you, and pray for everyone who is cruel to you. **29** If someone slaps you on one cheek, don't stop that person from slapping you on the other cheek. If someone wants to take your coat, don't try to keep back your shirt. **30** Give to everyone who asks and don't ask people to return what they have taken from you. **31** Treat others just as you want to be treated.
- 32** If you love only someone who loves you, will God praise you for that? Even sinners love people who love them. **33** If you are kind only to someone who is kind to you, will God be pleased with you for that? Even sinners are kind to people who are kind to them. **34** If you lend money only to someone you think will pay you back, will God be pleased with you for that? Even sinners lend to sinners because they think they will get it all back.
- 35** But love your enemies and be good to them. Lend without expecting to be paid back.[e] Then you will get a great reward, and you will be the true children of God in heaven. He is good even to people who are unthankful and cruel. **36** Have pity on others, just as your Father has pity on you.
- 37** Jesus said: Don't judge others, and God won't judge you. Don't be hard on others, and God won't be hard on you. Forgive others, and God will forgive you. **38** If you give to others, you will be given a full amount in return. It will be packed down, shaken together, and spilling over into your lap. The way you treat others is the way you will be treated.
- 39** Jesus also used some sayings as he spoke to the people. He said:

Can one blind person lead another blind person? Won't they both fall into a ditch? **40** Are students better than their teacher? But when they are fully trained, they will be like their teacher.

41 You can see the speck in your friend's eye, but you don't notice the log in your own eye. **42** How can you say, "My friend, let me take the speck out of your eye," when you don't see the log in your own eye? You show-offs! First, get the log out of your own eye; then you can see how to take the speck out of your friend's eye.

43 A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot produce good fruit.

44 You can tell what a tree is like by the fruit it produces. You cannot pick figs or grapes from thornbushes. **45** Good people do good things because of the good in their hearts, but bad people do bad things because of the evil in their hearts. Your words show what is in your heart.

46 Why do you keep on saying that I am your Lord, when you refuse to do what I say?

47 Anyone who comes and listens to me and obeys me **48** is like someone who dug down deep and built a house on solid rock. When a flood came and the river rushed against the house, it was built so well that it didn't even shake. **49** But anyone who hears what I say and doesn't obey me is like someone whose house wasn't built on solid rock. As soon as the river rushed against that house, it was smashed to pieces!

Found in the Contemporary English Version