**Psalm 37:1-11 & 39-40.**

**1Do not fret because of the wicked; do not be envious of wrongdoers,**

**2for they will soon fade like the grass, and wither like the green herb.**

**3Trust in the Lord, and do good; so you will live in the land, and enjoy security.**

**4Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.**

**5Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act.**

**6He will make your vindication shine like the light, and the justice of your cause like the noonday.**

**7Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him; do not fret over those who prosper in their way, over those who carry out evil devices.**

**8Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath. Do not fret—it leads only to evil.**

**9For the wicked shall be cut off, but those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land.**

**10Yet a little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look diligently for their place, they will not be there.**

**11But the meek shall inherit the land, and delight themselves in abundant prosperity.**

**39The salvation of the righteous is from the Lord; he is their refuge in the time of trouble.**

**40The Lord helps them and rescues them; he rescues them from the wicked, and saves them, because they take refuge in him.**

**Luke 6:27-38**

### **Love for Enemies**

**27“But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. 29If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. 30Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. 31Do to others as you would have them do to you.**

**32“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. 33And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. 34And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full.35But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. 36Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.**

**Perspective and Perseverance.**

**During times of challenge, hardship, injustice even, it is difficult to have a bigger perspective and to persevere, remaining faithful and keeping on walking step by step with God. The perspective we are to keep is given for us in Luke: Then ... you will be children of the Most High. The most important thing is that we be children of God. Children take after their parents and so our lives our lives are to take after our Heavenly Father. That is the perspective, whatever challenges we have, we are to live on earth as our Father would want us to.**

**We have been following the traditional lectionary which focusses this year on the gospel of Luke. The lectionary, I was taught at the school of ministry, is a good discipline because it means we were not just preaching our own favourite passages. Although, it is not completely chronological, some scriptures are left out, what it does do is make us look at some very challenging passages, ones which we might skip over if we were choosing what to speak on each week.**

**It would be good to look at Psalm 37 every week – a Psalm which is packed full of promises and assurance - but we might not want to look at Luke’s sermon on the plain, because it runs so counter to the way we might think is right. The lectionary gives us both today the promises and the challenges.**

**Today the readings call for perspective and perseverance.**

**Psalm 37: Especially encourages faithfulness when evil prospers and those who do wrong seem to get away with it. But no, we are not to fret over those who prosper in their wickedness, but we are to: 3Trust in the Lord, and do good… Take delight in the Lord. Commit your way to the Lord. Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him; Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath.**

**God promises that those who prosper from their evil works: will soon fade like the grass, and wither like the green herb. God is with the righteous and the faithful and it is those who will truly last. God’s word lifts our eyes towards what is really important and helps us to remain true to what we know is right, deep inside us.**

**There are so many promises in this scripture – maybe, later today, or in the days to come you can take Psalm 37 and write or type out all the promises it has in it and then sit with it for those, considering which are especially for you at this time. It is well worth spending time here.**

**However, we are not left with Psalm 37 on its own today. With it we have the sermon on the plain, where Jesus outlines the way his disciples are to live.**

**Remember to keep three contexts in mind. Jesus’ immediate hearers, those who Luke wrote to who would have received this this late in the first century and of course our own context.**

**As Jesus spoke, his immediate hearers would have known the reality of Roman soldiers around them. A reminder that they lived in occupied territory. The Romans were their enemies. Unpopular too would have been the Jewish authorities who were employed by Rome to carry out Rome’s business. So, when Jesus said: Love your enemies, their enemies were close at hand. If there was a large crowd gathered to hear Jesus speak, then it was likely that soldiers might even have been sent there to observe proceedings.**

**The second context – that of the early church. Luke was not an eye witness. He wasn’t laid back listening to this teaching, taking notes on his I-Pad. This teaching was passed to him as he compiled his Gospel for a mainly Gentile group of believers. Late first and into the second century believers were persecuted. Luke records that Jesus said: ‘Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you’.**

**The early Christians were misunderstood and so were cursed by others. They were accused of incest because they called each other brother and sister. They were accused of being atheists because they only believed in one God, not many; and many more things beside. But Jesus said: ‘bless those who curse you’. They were to do good to those who hated them, they were to turn the other cheek, they were to lend and not expect their things or their money back – I hate that one. In return for evil they were to do good. To summarize Jesus’ teaching, we might say he was instructing them that: the consistent response of love would ultimately win the day. They were to be known for their self-control and their response to evil, not reaction or retaliation.**

**Our context.**

**We are told to love others, this gives flesh to what love looks like. When we ask, what is the loving thing to do when faced with people who behave in unloving ways towards us, this scripture give us the direction. Bless those who curse you, do good and not evil.**

**A loving response does not add sin to sin. It does not repay an evil with another evil. A loving response is one which says, ‘even though you have hurt me, I am not going to hurt you in return.’ Violence only gets violence.**

**At the core of this passage we have the key principle: ‘Treat others as you want them to treat you’. In asking what is the loving thin to do, we are encouraged to put ourselves in another’s shoes, asking: if I was them, then how would I like to be treated?**

**Treating others as you want to be treated, keeps it human. It reminds you that the other person is a person as well. It prevents one from putting certain people into a box, or de-humanising them. Your enemy is not just “the enemy”. Your enemy is a person, just like you are. When we consider what is loving we can ask ourselves, well how would I like to be treated.**

**Today, we have a rising awareness of abuse, and bullying in society, among families and in work places. What does this say to those who are being bullied or abused? Does it say that you just have to take it? The principle is that one does not respond to abuse with abuse, hatred with hatred, or to violence with violence. However, what if a person is being bullied? The first thing to consider is that bullies are usually people who have been bullied, the temptation might be to give them a bit of their own medicine. Bullying is about power. Bullies are often looking for a reaction. They want us to strike back, then they know they have won. Resisting the taunting or whatever is going on, might just be enough to make the person move on. Not giving them what they want can de-power them.**

**Without, endangering yourself there might just be a way to do something good for the person. How radical, when someone is picking on you, taunting until you snap, but then you do something nice for them!**

**I remember at an Easter camp one year we had a whole lot of trouble from a group of guys. They were always getting into trouble. The leadership was tearing their hair out – someone was about to go home! At least we always knew who would be cleaning the toilets. One night these guys had been pulled out of the Marae where they had kept everyone awake way beyond lights out. I was myself asleep in my cabin, but Anna, one of the senior leaders at the camp, sat up with them and began chatting and one by one they opened up about their lives and the struggles which they were facing. Through Anna we were able to understand that they behaved in an out of control manner because their lives were out of control at home. Their bad behaviour lessened a bit, but when they did get into trouble there was a greater understanding and respect, because Anna had taken time to get to know them. They still had to do toilets the next day.**

**In a case though where there is bullying or abuse which is consistent and is not going to stop, then, maybe a community response is best. I remember seeing this in a movie, but have also read about it. In some villages in Africa the women have a unique response to violence and abuse. If a man is abusing their partner then they will get their pots and pans and go and stand outside the house, while it is going on and they will bang the pots as loudly as they can, creating such a racket that everyone in the area knows what is going on and the man is disgraced and given the strong message – not here mate.**

**A loving response might be that a community is gathered around a victim to see that they are protected from hatred, abuse, violence on them. Certainly, removing oneself from harm when it is consistent and on-going is the right thing to do. People have been urged to stay in relationships and just turn the other cheek, but this is not the scripture to apply in that case.**

**However, we face struggles with people who hate us, or mistreat us, the larger perspective is the one of the Kingdom of God.**

**Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.  Woa, we think of God as someone who is good to those who are good to Him and vengeful towards those who are not? No, he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. And, we are called to be like our Heavenly Father.**

**For many people through history, and today: injustice, hatred for being a Christian, and prejudice will never go away. In the end of the day, we are to live faithful lives, living by God’s standard of love, consistently, as best we can. We can cling to this, even if there is no change, even if injustice remains, as we love as God loves, then we are God’s children and we are promised that there will be a reward for us – if not in this world, in the next.**

**In Psalm 37, we are urged to be faithful to what God wants and we are assured that there will be a time when the wicked will be no more and have no power over us. God does not support the wicked in their prosperity. Their day will come. Although it seems an eternity when it is going on, there will be a day when it will seem like they have been blown away like chaff in the wind.**

**Jesus in Luke offers us the bigger picture of a loving God who does good to us even we don’t do good to Him, and so we are urged to live as children of God and to believe that a better day is coming.**

**Prayer of Response**