

Series: It's a Seussical Life: Discovering Creative Ways to Live as God's Kids

Sermon #4: "Buttering an Upside Down World"

Book: *The Butter Battle Book*

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (True love!)

Text: Matthew 5:38-39 "You have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

But I say to you that you must not oppose those who want to hurt you. If people slap you on your right cheek, you must turn the left cheek to them as well."

Theme: Getting along with others is an extension of God's working of salvation for sinners.

Sermon Blurb: We're getting worse at getting along! Violent acts of racism, religious expression, and different philosophical perspectives are rampant. Most of the time we shake our heads and wring our hands. What to do? This Sunday we're using Dr. Seuss' *The Butter Battle Book* to reveal how acts of aggression towards one another leave everyone a loser. God's way is very different. It requires embracing the radical practice of authentic love!

Gathering Song: *He Reigns*

Welcome: Pastor David

UMC: Open Communion for HC

World Communion Day

Worship Set: -Sanctify

The Same Love

Here, O Lord, Your Servants Gather

My Lighthouse

Worship prayer: Andrew

Book Reading: *The Butter Battle Book* - Andrew

Kids to Kid's Church

Message: "Buttering an Upside Down World"

PP#1: It's a Seussical Life: Discovering Creative Ways to Live as God's Kids

"Buttering an Upside Down World"

"You have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you that you must not oppose those who want to hurt you. If people slap you on your right cheek, you must turn the left cheek to them as well." -Matthew 5:38-39

It's a Seussical Life: Discovering Creative Ways to Live as God's Kids. "Buttering an Upside Down World." Matthew 5:38-39 "You have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you that you must not oppose those who want to hurt you. If people slap you on your right cheek, you must turn the left cheek to them as well."

Dr. Seuss's children's books are helping us see ourselves in a different way, so we can hear God's Word to us in a new way. As Christians, we live in an upside down way, different from all the rest. That's one of the reasons we can identify with Dr. Seuss' wacky stories. He's not a Christian author, *persea*, but he can remind us to look at things differently, perhaps even Seussically!

PP#2: *Images of Yertle the Turtle, The Lorax, and The Butter Battle Book*

Our story today definitely does that. It points to a way of life very different from the culture we swim in. Actually, Seuss liked to do that. His stories may seem simply silly on the surface, but he often put a message in them as well. Today's story is Seuss wading into social commentary. This isn't his first time. *Yertle the Turtle*, the turtle king who wanted a bigger and bigger kingdom, published in 1942, suggested Adolph Hitler. *The Lorax*, which Seuss said was his favorite story, published in 1971, tried to express the danger of rampant deforestation and treating the environment as a consumable for short-term, senseless economic gain.

The Butter Battle Book came out right during the height of the Cold War, in 1984, and obviously criticized the nuclear arms race buildup. It was so obvious that in some libraries, when it first came out, banned or removed it from the shelves because it unpatriotically suggested that the arms buildup may not be in America's best interests.

But it is here that perhaps we may even find that Seuss helps us hear God's Word for us today. Can we look at things differently than the rest of the world around us? Does it have to be the way it is, or can we see another way? Is our human way of dealing with things really the best—or even only—way?

PP#3: What is your initial reaction: Is different beautiful, or weird?

I believe in original sin. I know this is not a popular Christian teaching, but the older I get, the more I must admit it is true. There is a brokenness in how we humans tend to behave, tend to see things, tend to react. We're selfish. We want things our way. And when we are challenged with something that isn't our way, or familiar to us, we're "anti."

Or, we're fearful. We fear what the new could do, the problems it could raise, the pain it could cause. "Just keep it the way I understand it! The devil I know is better than the one I don't!"

Now, I'm not saying that I think we should be reckless, or blindly accept every new thing. I mean, be honest, how many of us get excited when we're told they're planning a new systems upgrade a work! It's just so painful! But I think that Christians need to call out the lurking foundations of selfishness and fear, both of which pull us away from God.

PP#4: "Fear not!" declares the Lord, "for I am with you." -Isaiah 41:10

Our faith in God calls us to put others first, and to give our fear to God. We do not live in fear! We have a trust in God that takes mitigates our obsession with safety. We have a hope in life beyond this. Death has no power over us!

This doesn't mean we become foolish or naive. But it does free us to live differently, to see things differently, to react differently.

Consider the "bent" human desire for retaliation. You hit me...I...what? I hit you back! But not just hit you back, but hit you back just little a bit harder. After all, you violated me by hitting me, and also by hitting me without pretense. Therefore I hid you back, and hit you back harder. Retaliation has the *anti-ing up* effect. "I see your violation, and I raise you one violation more."

In ancient Babylon, King Hammurabi made a break-through decree: "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." This revolutionary concept was to curb the human tendency to pay back greater. There was an escalation going on that was hurting everyone! Retribution was getting out of hand.

PP#5: “Vengeance is mine, declares the Lord!” -Deuteronomy 32:35

Hammurabi’s code is in the Bible. But God’s way goes beyond it. Rather than just limiting retribution, God’s way challenges the very need to get retribution! God’s way is different. God’s radical, crazy perspective is: forgiveness!

What? Ridiculous! That would be like buttering the bottom of the slice of bread. Crazy talk.

God goes beyond limiting retribution. God goes to restoring our seeing of the other person, who violated us, not as an offender, but as a person made in God’s image. How do you treat something so valuable?

Retribution, although legal, continues to spread the hurt. Like Tevye said in “Fiddler on the roof: “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth? That way the whole world will be blind and toothless!” Gandhi put it well, “An eye for an eye leaves the whole world blind.”

That kind of climate causes us to build up walls, remain fearful. But God dares to dream of a different world. God wants more out of life, out of us. How about a world that is not governed by human fairness, or based on fear, or selfishness, or walls?

PP6: *Disturbing headlines of violence, murder, and retaliation.*

We’re not doing very well making progress toward this kind of world. Just this past week a 14 year old boy killed his father, drove a pickup to his school and shot three people. The six year old boy died yesterday. In North Carolina the demonstrations against the mistaken shooting of an unarmed black man got so violent that bricks were thrown, hitting people in the head. Normal Minnesotans walking in a mall in St. Cloud were stabbed by a very messed up person, claiming he was doing it for God. Demonstrations in Milwaukee Wisconsin, the Twin Cities, claiming racism is causing people to treat others unfairly. Murderous violence against innocent, random cops.

What do you do when people treat other people badly? Does forgiveness work against racism? Against bigotry? Against the threat of harm? Against an entrenched system that wields power abusively?

PP#7: *Image of Jesus bound in front of the mob shouting for His crucifixion.*

If you dare, let’s take a look at what Scripture says. Be warned...you won’t like it! After all, our human selves are “anti,” right? It will challenge our fear and our selfishness. Hang on!

We talk a lot as Christians about Jesus on the cross. But we don’t talk enough about how He got there...I mean, in actual historical events! In recorded history, Jesus was a political victim of vicious abuse. His official crime was claiming to be a king, even though not of this world. People with power hated Him for not conforming to their unfair and unjust systems, and had to make an example of Him—get Him out of the way—lest the people all refused to conform. That’s how Jesus ended up on the cross.

PP#8: Matthew 5

Jesus said, 38 “You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ 39 But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. 40 And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. ...

43 “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ 44 But I tell

you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 that you may be children of your Father in heaven....”

Jesus didn't play by their rules, so He had to go. Jesus dared to introduce something different, something new. Jesus taught that people *are people*, and that we must always treat them that way. Jesus lived that out, looking at people—really seeing them—as a special to God, treasured by God, no matter what they look like or what they do. Jesus showed a different way of life, where you love your enemy because *you* are a child of God.

Does forgiveness work? Actually, it doesn't. Look at Jesus. They put Him on the cross. He lost the fairness game.

But here's the Gospel Jesus gave us: it's not about fair. God's people don't live by fair. Because God doesn't live by fair. Fair is based on selfishness: “I deserve my portion!” God calls His kids to give up their portion, and give it away. Jesus did. And we follow Jesus.

That's crazy. That's buttering an upside down world.

PP#9: 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Forgiveness comes from grace, which comes from love. Fairness does not. It is easy to forgive someone you love. You care more about them than you do about yourself. Rather than seeking what is equal, it seeks the better of the other. “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.”

When we see Jesus standing in front of the crowd of people that He came to help, being condemned by them viciously, unfairly, and we see Him choosing to forgive them rather than to retaliate, we see love. God is love, and that's what we see when we see Jesus.

PP#10: *Image for letting the Holy Spirit fight on our behalf.*

Now, please don't block this out because it can be interpreted to be destructive. God does not call us to stay in abusive relationships. God does want us to fight for justice, to stand up for the victim, to call for change when abuse is occurring. God wants us to do our part to change our world. But don't ever forget that vengeance belongs to God. Godly justice is not self-seeking. We stand up for what is right, but do that by also being ready to stand with Jesus, giving up our right for retribution. And we let God fight for us.

PP#11: *Image fr The Butter Battle w'grandpa & Van Itch facing each other with big weapons*

The problem between the Zooks and Yooks is that they vilified the other because they were different. But people are people, whether you butter your bread on the top, or bottom, or if you don't want butter, or even bread! Or if you eat sauerkraut, or curry, or hummus or even...are you ready for this...brace yourselves...even lutefisk!! [Gasp!]

And Seuss is pointing out the biblical truth that we all do this. We vilify others, because of our selfishness and fear. Both grandpa and Van Itch are stubborn, shallow, and unrelenting. And the end of the book leaves it unresolved. What will happen? That's the point. What *can* happen when you construe the world based on inflexible narrow-mindedness?

Or, perhaps we could ask, what *should* happen?

Now, I'm not suggesting that big, complex problems like racism, or international tensions, or inbred hatred can be solved by love. That's naive. Right? I mean, hate is just too strong. So is fear. So is selfishness! Too strong.

Or is it?

PP#12: *Final image in The Butter Battle, w/grandpa facing Van Itch, w/the boy on the side*

I love the final image of this book. I love it because the boy is off on the side, watching his grandpa and Van Itch. It begs the question: what about the child? Is it so worth sticking to your guns (pun intended), to your rightness, that you are willing to compromise the good for the child?

The *issue* cannot be resolved. They are stuck. But what if there is room for something other than the issue?

Fallen people as we are, perhaps, if we consider the child, even we can find the hope in love over hate, love over fear, love over selfishness. The child helps us see the person rather than the issue, and *then* love can change the outcome.

What if both grandpa and Van Itch agree, for the sake of the child, to put their bombs away? There could be a different future.

PP#13: "Buttering an Upside Down World"

Willfully choosing to see the other first as God's treasured child.

Here is the biblical hope I want us to take away today: see the other as God's child. When we do, the *issue* is taken off the shelf, the wall. A different truth, more important truth, emerges. Love can change the outcome.

This doesn't mean we stop truthing, for God is truth. But we change how we truth. We truth in love. We keep first and foremost—always!—the relationship. We choose to see the other as God's beloved child. And when we do, only then, we act.

We can't change the troubles of our upside down world, but you and I, we can choose to stand with Jesus.

Butter side up, butter side down
 Butter is everywhere, all over this town
 Those darn yooks . . . "NO, it's terrible zooks!"
 Wait, I can't remember, which ones are the crooks?
 Their wall is so scary, rigid and tall,
 Makes all people feel, quite timid and small.
 What could have happened, had gramps or VanItch
 Buttered their bread, wrong for a switch?
 Perhaps they'd put down, their inventions and guns
 And their beautiful families, could all join as one.
 So God give us love, and grace to do this,
 So we have less of bombs, but more forgiveness.

Amen!

Prayers: Janet Morey

Holy Communion & Offering

Great Thanksgiving: Janet Morey

Words of Institution: Janet Morey & David Werner

Lord's Prayer

Instructions

We will be receiving Holy Communion in "shifts," as seats are open

Come down to the table (both sides) and break bread together

Bring offerings as you come

Stand next to people you know on the same side

Take Communion with the person across from you:

Each choose a piece of bread, and eat together

Hand one another a cup of juice, and drink together

Close praying with the person across from you, using the printed prayer provided.

Return to your seat when you are done.

Next "shift" comes in.

Sanctify a part of the first "shift."

If you cannot come forward, simply wait in our seat, and the elements will be brought to you.

Receiving the Elements

Communion Song: *Kyrie Eleison* -Sanctify

Closing Song: *Siyahamba (We Are Marching)*

Benediction: Pastor David