

# “Good News from Jesus’ Sermon on the Plain”

First Presbyterian Church, Champaign, Illinois  
Luke 6:27-38

February 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022  
Matt Matthews

There’s a small coming-of-age, feel-good dramady called *Carrie Philbin*.

Carrie is a prodigy, graduating Harvard at 18. She’s the smartest person in every room. And she’s not happy. She’s always been on the outside looking in. She doesn’t have friends. Her mother died years ago shattering, we presume, an otherwise happy family. Dad now lives in London, a city Carrie dislikes. He’s moving on with his life, he’s engaged, with step kids.

Meanwhile, Carrie—our awkward, struggling protagonist—is trying to find herself in NYC. She’s a young woman living alone, feeling alone, standoffish, spoiled, human, hurting, and we, the viewer, want to love her. We want it to work for her. We are pulling for her.

On a lonely Christmas Eve, she does something completely out of character.

She prays.

“Hey, God,” she says. “I’m not going to lie. I don’t really believe in you. So, I don’t really know what I’m doing, or who I’m talking to.”

But she talks to God. She trusts God with the contents of her heart. She prays.

In the unlikely event that God does exist, she prays her heart out. She begins to pray for the world: the homeless, the old, any who suffer. She apologizes for her selfishness. She misses her mother. If God could get a message to her, that would be great. She really, really misses her. She wants things to go better with her dad.

She’s in a miserable moment and she has no other way out. Carrie Philbin turns to the last thing that just might work.

God. Carrie Philbin turns to God.

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This is to whom Jesus turns in his ministry. To God. Jesus demonstrates that God is available. God hears prayers. For a person who is faithful, God is his or her ‘center.’ God is the core.

Without this focus on God, the Christian life is impossible.

In the sermon on the plain today in Luke, Jesus sets a seemingly impossibly high standard: Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who abuse you.

Living this way—with this kind of counterintuitive love—would be impossible without God. We can only love like this when we know that we are already loved like this. We are as undeserving of God’s love as other people might be of our love. God’s Love is pure and holy gift. God’s love is not merit-based. Our love is to follow suite.

The gospel of Jesus demonstrates that God’s love is costly.

God's love is beautiful.

God's love transcends human limits.

God's love always leads us to danger, to enemies, to a cross.

God's love always involves sacrifice.

And God's love never fails.

Jesus demonstrates this in his life, his death, his resurrection. He can love others only because he stays focused on God, focused on God's power, focused on God's will, focused on God's grace, focused on God's love. "Not my will," Jesus prays in the garden before his death, "but *your* will be done."

Human love is not enough.

God's love is enough. God's love transforms human love.

And this is what Jesus wants us to remember. God's love enables us to love beyond ourselves. We can, by grace, truly love our enemy and pray honestly for those who persecute us.

When we allow God's love to fill us, there is no room left in us for hate, no room left for apathy, no room for snarky disdain. God's love cleanses and evaporates lesser love, selfish love, greedy love.

With God's love there is no room for anything else, no room for lesser things.

Such surrender to and trust in God's love allows us to offer our shirt when someone needs our coat, and our right cheek when they strike our left.

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This is the way Carrie prayed on Christmas Eve.

In the act of reaching for God, she let go over everything else—every burden, every woe, every shred of hate, every fear.

Filled by God's love, Carrie Philbin, could do all things.

And by God's grace, so can we.

AMEN.