This week's Gospel is the second part of Jesus' teaching on the "flat ground" that Susan started last week. Location and context is important to understand Jesus' message, so let me come back to the content of his words in a second.

Rewind to *Luke 5:3.* He is publicly teaching in his "boat sermon" before the "flat ground sermon".   Jesus *sat down and taught the people from the boat.* This is a good teaching technique, if for no other reason that the water would amplify his voice. He hasn't named the twelve yet, but is working hard to recruit three while teaching the crowd.

After the boat sermon, they go fishing. As a result, Peter gets scared by Jesus' power. Jesus then only calls James, John, and Peter. Remember those names, especially for next week's "Transfiguration Sunday." After he called the three, he immediately starts healing the paralyzed and the leperous. If that was not enough, he has chutzpah to actually enjoy hanging out with "sinners" and outcast for the rest of Chapter 5.

In Chapter 6 before the flatland sermon, He "works" on Sunday by plucking grain from a field to eat. The religious get huffy about him working on a Sunday.   This sounds silly to us, but this act has huge symbolic weight. "He's got the whole world in his hands the little bitty babies... and the wheat fields." Jesus says "the Son of Man is the Lord of the Sabbath." As the Lord, he has freedom to work and bless whenever the Spirit moves, thank you very much.   *I could get really picky and theological with and split hair about the history of Son of God/ Son of Man but won't.*   After all that, he finally calls all twelve disciples into ministry.

All that background brings us to his flatland sermon today.   It is very tempting to gloss over this text and say, "Well...in balance, I'm doing pretty good, I have not attacked anyone, only yelled a little bit at my kids, and only hated my boss 20% of the time." But we miss why we are 'nice' in the first place.   Like that insipid AT&T commercial says, "Just ok is not ok."

If you hear this teaching as sort of an ethical checklist, then you are missing the punchline - loving enemies and blessing the ones who curse you is a Kingdom of God act and not a way to heroically become a better person.   Your deeds point to a God of Love. That may sound too foo foo for you so maybe another quote is in order. The quote is often misattributed to Mother Teresa, but the end of this poem says -

The good you do today, will often be forgotten; Do good anyway. Give the best you have, and it may never be enough; Give your best anyway. In the final analysis, it is between you and God; It was never between you and them anyway.

Jesus is not doing something new in his flatland sermon He is looking forward and backward. He is inviting us to root our "ethical action" in the covenant past (Old Testament) and hopeful future. I know I have made a huge leap so let me explain the covenant past:

After Charleton Heston aka Moses led a rebellion that freed the Hebrews from Egypt, the whole group had to figure out what kind of community there were supposed to be. They no longer had the Egyptian slave drivers telling them who they were. Somewhat rudderless - they were all over the morality map.   They had strayed from a foundation. A foundation of being one people.

They were called to be one people that took care of widows, orphans, sojourners, and aliens. They were not to mirror the two tiered society they had left. Exodus says,

Exodus 12 there is one law for the native and for the stranger who sojourns among you. Exodus 22 for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child.

The ethics of the Hebrews and how they treated strangers was rooted in God's presence and character. It was **not** rooted in how good they felt about helping the downtrodden. On top of all that, God was leading them around by the nose with fire and smoke. Me thinks by design. It's harder (not impossible) to feel superior to others when you pitch tents together.

Exodus 13:21 By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. 22 Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.

Therefore, When Jesus says,
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."

He is doing some next level Exodus stuff, which is really Kingdom of God stuff. Ethical actions is not about us, but about reflecting the character of God. The Gospel of Luke is very invested in the Book of Exodus. Luke sees Jesus is the new Moses and his people are on a journey to a new promised land. *I can talk about the oppression of the Roman imperial system in another sermon.*

We can love and be radically merciful, because of the desert Hebrews' experience. When enemies are loved, slaves are freed, and debts wiped away we become one people in God.

Future Hope
I have gone on and on about Exodus, but Jesus was also looking forward where every tear is no longer. He taught about a "present future" where no one is greater than the greatest love that binds us all together. This future can only start with the basics. If God is really in charge, then we can love each other in thought, word and deed, without wondering if our or their checklist is good enough.

Next week
Remember the first three disciples, Peter, James and John? They show up in next week's Gospel when he goes up the Mount of Transfiguration. You need flat places full of expectation, but also mountaintops full of glory to balance it out. Stay tuned.

                                                                                    Todd