I love the collect of the day so much, I think it bears repeating…Let us pray:

*O Lord, who hast taught us that all our doings without charity are nothing worth; Send thy Holy Ghost and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of charity, the very bond of peace and of all virtue, without which whosoever liveth is counted dead before thee. Grant this for thine only Son Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.*

My first real job in High School was at a grocery store up the road from my house in Melbourne, FL. The store is called Publix, and anyone who has made it a bit east and a bit south can tell you how awesome Publix is. I worked there for years and still love it there. Anyway, I remember my first all-staff meeting. It was impossibly early on a Saturday morning, and I wasn't quite used to the inhumanity of waking up early for work on a weekend just yet. I remember it being kind of fun, to see a bunch of my work friends, some of whom were school friends, and some just who were just cool people I worked with a few days a week. But after the bagels had been eaten, and the thank-yous said, it was time for the heavy. Most of you of probably heave felt, or maybe even dealt, the heavy: the moment when a leader or boss has to give a system wide corrective because things aren't going the right direction. We knew something was coming, but we didn't know what; our usually super chill assistant store manager, Duane, looked kind of tense, and Ms. Wendy the front of house manager looked like she was ready to crack skulls.

Then it came. The front of house staff, the cashiers, the baggers of which I was one, well, we weren't fulfilling one of our main promises. We were supposed to, without fail, without exception, take every customer's cart out for them and help them pack their groceries into the car. Ms. Wendy looked so disappointed in us. Duane actually seemed fine on second glance, honestly. But we were suddenly aware of the fact that we weren't doing what we said we'd do. And honestly, we felt pretty bad about it. Or at least I did.

Sometimes when I read a text like the one we heard from St. Luke's Gospel this morning, my mind goes right back to that moment of the grocery cart heavy: I know the drill but, I know I really am not measuring up here. Coming off the heels of the blessings and woes of last week, we might have expected to hear something challenging in the next part of the chapter but this, this is a challenge:

"Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who persecute you."

There's not a caveat in sight. There's no footnote to run to. Our Lord Jesus has laid down some of the most clear and direct imperatives of his ministry. For those that would listen to him, follow, and love him, he has just upended some pretty basic assumptions for how relationships work. You can imagine the guy a few rows back at Jesus' sermon, the guy who is trying to follow, but having a hard time tracking. He thinks to himself, "wait enemies aren't people I love, they are people I want to avoid at best and fight at worst. I have a hard enough time doing good for the folks I like; let alone the folks I hate. And anyone who comes at me will definitely get something, but it won't be prayer."

And that guy a few rows back at Jesus' sermon is on to something, even if we know that Jesus is right. Jesus' ethical teaching completely upends the usual order of "do nice things for friends and bad things to enemies." In fact, he even seems to think it's kind of lame to do nice things for the people you love. I mean that's kind of expected, he might say, but how much better, to do the unexpected and take care of someone you really don't like.

Again, I read this and I'm the bag boy who has shirked the shopping cart duty. I mean I've got the best excuses, right? It's so busy sometimes and I don't want to leave my cashier without a bagger. Or when the customer just tells me they don't want me to bring the cart out (even though I've been halfhearted in my approach). But the managers back then did something really wise. They told us *why* we take the carts out. We do it, despite the fact that not everyone wants it or despite the fact that it's busy because it shows the customers how much we value their patronage, how grateful we are for their shopping with us. That idea kind of bounced off my friends, but for me that really clicked. I liked serving customers and I liked the idea that we were showing them appreciation.

Thus, in the vein of Ms. Wendy the front of house manager, I offer why Jesus might give us ethical mandates that completely mess with the moral universe that we tend to live in. He told us to love our enemies, to bless those who hate us, to pray for those that persecute us because he desperately wants for us to see one another the way he sees us. There is not one single person in this room, in any room, in any place on this entire planet that Jesus does not love. Now, some have decided to ignore that love (which is a real shame, eschatologically speaking). But even those who ignore or reject Jesus? He still loves them. And when they turn towards them, he's there to receive them. Jesus would have us orient our hearts like he does. I'm not going to say that it isn't hard. I'm not going to say that we'll get it right. But I will say that once we've started to try to look upon people the way that God sees us in Christ, things really do start to change in our hearts and in our lives.

And I think a lot of the time we test this mentally with all sorts of extreme situations and people. Certainly, Jesus' teachings in this regard are stretched to their metaphysical limits by how awful humans can be to one another. But I pray that before we let the extremes disprove the rule, consider how transformative this teaching is in our regular lives. When we love our enemies, we don't love what they have done for us or condone what wickedness it is that has opened the wound of enmity. We are rather allowing God's love to work out through us, healing us along the way, as we pray for some reconciliation. I've seen it happen. Reconciliation is an everyday miracle; enemies doing the hard work of figuring out how to love one another is truly the mark of a mighty God.

So maybe you heard the Gospel this morning and felt the heavy. Maybe you've got that feeling that I had when Ms. Wendy let us have it that morning at Publix, or when I know I haven't been kind to somebody that God loves but I am not sure about. Just know that to struggle with this is to be as one who listens to Jesus. And for this struggle, he has sent his Holy Spirit to comfort us when the enemies close in and assail us just as the same Spirit show us that we can love people like God does. Honestly one of the most important aspects of the Church's life is as a training ground for living out the hard teachings of Jesus. This should be a safe place to work out what it means for us to love one another like God does, and to be ready to reconcile with those that injure us. That is, after all, one of the reasons why each time we meet to worship we pray the Lord's Prayer, wherein we petition God to forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those that trespass against us.

Forgiveness and loving our enemies are, admittedly, of much higher stakes than pushing out all the grocery carts. But I think the challenge of Christ's teaching might be such that we might ignore it from time to time, or pretend that it's for the monks, priests, and theologians to worry about. I suppose that's true. But as your brother, I want to encourage you to take heed to Jesus as we heard from him today because this is the kind of life healing, world changing stuff that shouldn't get lost in the shuffle. No matter what happens, though, I pray that we would rest in the assurance that –

The Lord will help us and rescue us; \*

he will rescue us from the wicked and deliver us,

because we seek refuge in him.

To God be all glory: from age to age. Amen.