

Pastor Gregory P. Fryer
Immanuel Lutheran Church, New York, NY
11/6/2016, All Saints Sunday
Luke 6:20-31

In the name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Jesus says this to his disciples:

²⁷...I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; (Luke 6:27-29, NRSV)

Let me tell you about someone in literature who believed this with all her heart. Her name is Hetty Hutter, and I am reading about her nowadays in *The Deerslayer*, by James Fenimore Cooper. In my edition of Cooper's five *Leatherstocking Tales*, *The Deerslayer* is the first of the novels. Actually, it was the last of the five to be written, but its time period — 1740-45 — is the earliest in the lifetime of the hero of the tales — a noble and resourceful frontiersman called "Deerslayer" in this novel (Natty Bumppo). He is called "Deerslayer" because he is renowned as a man who is willing to kill deer for food, but grieves to kill people — even his enemies. He is unusual in those rough times.

Before I tell you about Hetty Hutter, let me say a word about the author, James Fenimore Cooper — a New York writer. To modern ears, Cooper writes with rather blunt categories about men and women, white people and native Americans. He calls white people "pale faces" and native Americans he calls "red skins." The men tend to be rough and violent, and the women tend to be emotional and kind. But within these blunt categories, Cooper develops some nuanced and fine characters. He gives credit where credit is due. One of his most appealing characters, for example, is a Delaware Indian chief named Chingachgook. Even if he is sketching an enemy of Deerslayer, he praises that enemy if there are virtues to be found in the man, in the woman. James Fenimore Cooper was one of our early American writers. He wrote all five of his *Leatherstocking Tales* (1823-41), for example, before Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) or Herman Melville wrote *Moby Dick* (1851). James Fenimore Cooper was a New York writer admired around the world. While on his death bed, for example, the Austrian composer Franz

Schubert wanted most to read more of Cooper's novels. de Balzac, the French novelist and playwright, admired him greatly.¹

Okay, back to Hetty Hutter. She is one of two daughters of a rough frontiersman named Tom Hutter. The other daughter, Judith, is beautiful and bright of mind. Hetty, on the other hand, is simple and innocent. In fact, people think she is dim-witted, and she believes them. I guess she is.

The setting for the novel is Otsego Lake, at the headwaters of the Susquehanna River, near Cooperstown, New York. Tom Hutter and his daughters live in a fortified house on a sandbar far out in the lake, as if they live on an island.

In the particular scene I want to lift up, Tom Hutter and his friend Henry March, who is a giant of a man, rough and violent... Hutter and March go ashore in hope of scalping Indian women and children. They are captured, and likely they themselves will be scalped.

But Hetty thinks she can save them by going ashore and reading the Bible to the Indians. Deerslayer asks her what she has in mind. She gives this answer:

“Well, then, Deerslayer, as you seem a good and honest young man I will tell you. I mean not to say a word to any of the savages until I get face to face with their head chief, let them plague me with as many questions as they please I'll answer none of them, unless it be to tell them to lead me to their wisest man— Then, Deerslayer, I'll tell him that God will not forgive murder, and thefts; and that if father and Hurry (Henry March) did go after the scalps of the Iroquois, he *must* return good for evil, for so the Bible commands, else he will go into everlasting punishment. When he hears this, and feels it to be true, as feel it he must, how long will it be before he sends father, and Hurry (March), and me to the shore, opposite the castle, telling us all three to go our way in peace?”²

As it turns out, Hetty does this. She slips ashore and suddenly appears in the Indian camp. They quickly recognize that she is a simple soul, and they honor such people, so they listen to her as she reads the Bible to them.

The chief is not persuaded. He gives this answer:

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Fenimore_Cooper

² Cooper, James Fenimore. *The Complete Leatherstocking Tales: All 5 Books* (Kindle Location 2664-2671). Waxkeep Publishing. Kindle Edition.

“This is the pale-face law,” resumed the chief. “It tells him to do good to them that hurt him, and when his brother asks him for his rifle to give him the powder horn, too. Such is the pale-face law?”

“Not so— not so—” answered Hetty earnestly, when these words had been interpreted— “There is not a word about rifles in the whole book, and powder and bullets give offence to the Great Spirit.”

“Why then does the pale-face use them? If he is ordered to give double to him that asks only for one thing, why does he take double from the poor Indian who ask for no thing. He comes from beyond the rising sun, with this book in his hand, and he teaches the red man to read it, but why does he forget himself all it says? When the Indian gives, he is never satisfied; and now he offers gold for the scalps of our women and children, though he calls us beasts if we take the scalp of a warrior killed in open war.”³

So says the Indian chief Rivenoak.

Now, the thing that especially interests me about this scene is that poor Hetty does not know how to answer. She is being questioned about what the theologians call “the mystery of iniquity.” She does not know how to answer and so she bursts into tears.⁴ That’s all she can do. But God bless her for her faith and for her yearning. She yearns for a world in which the laws of Jesus prevail. She wants to live in such a world. So do the saints.

And so we come to this morning’s celebration, All Saints Sunday. The saints yearn for a better, more Christ-like world, and they do something about it. It sometimes leaves them out of synch with the normal world, but what can they do? They have given their hearts to Jesus. Someone once said about the saints that they are cheerful, when no one else can see reason for cheer; they are patient even when they would love to forge ahead; they stand when others run; they are agreeable when they would like to disagree. But then, after all, they are the salt of the earth, for they really try to follow that golden teaching of Jesus: “Do to others as you would have them do to you” (Luke 6:31).

³ Cooper, James Fenimore. *The Complete Leatherstocking Tales: All 5 Books* (Kindle Locations 3083-3090). Waxkeep Publishing. Kindle Edition.

⁴ Cooper, James Fenimore. *The Complete Leatherstocking Tales: All 5 Books* (Kindle Locations 3100-3101). Waxkeep Publishing. Kindle Edition.

You and I also yearn for a more Christ-like world. There is something saint-like about each of you within the sound of my voice. If we bear the name of Christ, I believe we want to live more completely for him.

But, alas, we fall short. At least, *so far* we have not been as saint-like as Jesus would have us to be. And so it is that the Good Friday “Solemn Reproaches,” for example, ring true for us. It is a moving time each year — the conclusion of our Good Friday liturgy. Pastor Thomas Green preaches for us. The Immanuel Choir and congregation sing beautifully. And then it is time for me to kneel at the Communion rail to lead us in the Reproaches. They begin with a lament that Jesus could well say over us:

O my people, O my Church, what have I done to you? How have I offended you?

Then, Jesus, lifts up his preaching and how we fall short of it. Here are some examples:

☐ I gave you my peace which the world could not give, and you draw the sword and strike in my name. I washed your feet as the sign of my love, and you seek high places in my kingdom. I offered you my Body and Blood, and you deny me, scatter, and abandon me.

☑ **Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal, have mercy on us.**

☐ Oh my people, O my Church, what more could I have done for you? Answer me. I came to you in the least of your brothers and sisters, but I was hungry and you gave me no food, thirsty and you gave me no drink, a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me, and you have prepared a cross for your Saviour.

☑ **Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal, have mercy on us.**

The world might think Hetty Hutter to be a simpleton, but she has a kind of holy simplicity about her. She simply wants a world in which Jesus and his ways hold sway. The saints are like her. They hear of Jesus, they hear that he lives, and they want to live for him, no matter how out of synch it places them in their generation.

The saints are not supermen or superwomen. They are human beings like you and me. But they are people who open their hearts to the story of Jesus, and in the opening of their hearts in this manner, they become a blessing for others on earth. They make the world better. They become a blessing as they try to follow on with the One we should try to follow too, with even more

earnestness: our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory with the Father and the Holy Spirit now and forever. Amen.