

Love Your Enemies – Really!
Preached February 23, 2025
Genesis 45:3-11, 15; Luke 6:27- 38

This morning, I dare to attempt to share some thoughts on two well-known passages of scripture from Genesis and Luke as they are presented in the Lectionary for this Sunday.

We read in Luke that Jesus teaches that we should love our enemies. It is not up for discussion; it is an incredible standard for compassion.

My truth and just maybe yours is that to love my enemies is not so easy. There are times when I find that it is nearly impossible to even consider! Having made that confession, I should probably stop now, ask for God’s forgiveness and yours and leave.

However, I know that Jesus is correct and so I must delve deeply into what he is asking of me – and all of us.

“In the Old Testament, the story of Joseph and his brothers is very important, particularly its outcome. Joseph is the favored one. The older brothers say, ‘Dad always liked you best.’ In this case it was true. The brothers go out and fake Joseph’s death. They bring back some bloodied clothes and say to their father, ‘He is dead.’ In actuality they have sold him into slavery in Egypt. Time passes. Famine comes to Israel. These brothers are forced to go to Egypt and ask the king for food. Traditionally, the king has been their enemy. Can you imagine the drama of that moment when Joseph reveals himself to them with forgiveness and says, ‘You intended what you did to me as something that would create evil, but God and I were able to bend it into something good.’”

Listen again to Joseph’s words to his brothers, “do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life.” “So, it was not you who sent me here, but God....” Joseph directs that his father and family and livestock and herds move to Goshen to live and be provided for.

How many of us could be so forgiving and loving in such a situation? This is really loving your enemies, even your own brothers!

We come now to today’s reading from Luke.

Jesus asks us to do good to those who hate us; and bless those who curse us; and pray for those who mistreat us and on and on. Here Jesus is saying, do_not do to others what they do to you. Jesus ends by stating Luke’s version of The Golden Rule “Do to others as you would have them do to you” which can be found in Matthew 7:12, and in Homer, Seneca, Tobit, 2 Enoch, Philo and in several other places.

Jesus continues to say that we should not react towards others as they act toward us. If you love others who love you, what good is that. Sinners do the same. If you do good to others who do good to you, what good is that Sinners do the same. If you lend to other from whom

you expect repayment, sinners do that. Instead, love enemies, do good, lend, expecting nothing in return. Be merciful as God is merciful.

In the ending of today's passage from Luke we are directed to not judge nor condemn, to forgive, to give and we will not be judged nor condemned. We will be forgiven and will receive.

Love your enemies – really! {?} Look at the title of today's sermon in your bulletin. I agonized over that title for some time. It could be stated in two very different ways.

I was still in a quandary as to how I could accept and follow Jesus' command the I love my enemies, so I did some research and found some documents which would, hopefully, show me how to do that.

Everett Washington describes forgiveness this way:

“People use the term “forgiveness” loosely and mean different things...It is more than just relinquishing judgment to God or simply accepting the hurt and letting it pass. True forgiveness occurs when those cold emotions of unforgiveness are changed to warm, loving, compassionate, caring, altruistic emotions resulting from a heartfelt transformation. Forgiveness is both an act and a process. It could be compared to cancelling a debt. Forgiveness is not the same as reconciliation. It takes two to reconcile; it takes only one to forgive.”

James Hewett writes in **Doing Right Anyway**:

People are unreasonable, illogical, and self-centered. Love them anyway.

If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish ulterior motives. Do good anyway.

If you are successful, you will win false friends and true enemies. Succeed anyway.

Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable. Be honest and frank anyway.

The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow. Do good anyway.

The biggest people with the biggest ideas can be shot down by the smallest people with the smallest minds. Think big anyway.

People favor underdogs but follow only top dogs. Fight for some underdogs anyway.

What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight. Build anyway.

Maxie Dunnam shares a story of Mark Twain

At the peak of his career, Mark Twain received five dollars a word for the magazine articles he wrote. Someone sent Twain a five-dollar bill with this note:

Dear Mr. Twain, please send me a good word.”

On a sheet of paper, Twain responded with one word...thanks.

Thanks, is a good word. It is a good word because being grateful keeps our perspective clear. When we say thanks, we acknowledge that we cannot make it on our own. We are dependent on others.

And, from an unknown author the following which captures the frustration and guilt of many.

A weary mother returned from the store, lugging groceries, through the kitchen door. Awaiting her arrival was her 8-year-old son, anxious to relate what his younger brother had done.

“While I was out playing and Dad was on a call, T.J. took his crayons and wrote on the wall! It’s on the new paper you just hung in the den. I told him you’d be mad at having to do it again.”

She let out a moan and furrowed her brow, “Where is you little brother right not?” She emptied her arms and with a purposeful stride, she marched to his closet where he had gone to hide.

She called his full name as she entered his room. He trembled with fear-he knew that meant doom? For the next ten minutes, she ranted and raved about the expensive wallpaper and how she had saved.

Lamenting all the work it would take to repair; she condemned his actions and total lack of care. The more she scolded, the madder she got, then stomped from his room, totally distraught!

She headed for the den to confirm her fears. When she saw the wall, her eyes flooded with tears. The message she read pierced her soul with a dart. It said, “I love Mommy,” surrounded by a heart.

Well, the wallpaper remained, just as she found it, with an empty picture frame hung to surround it. A reminder to her, and indeed to all, take time to read the handwriting on the wall.

And, so I close this morning with the words of Ed Horstman who has greatly helped me, and perhaps us, to understand what Jesus meant when he said, “Love your enemies.”

“Love your enemies.” I have heard people say that this kind of loving is unnatural, counterintuitive, pointless, and impossible. But what if Jesus thinks that the human capacity for loving those who harm us is the most natural form of love? After all, aren’t we born with the image of God? Isn’t God’s way of loving woven into the deepest and most vulnerable parts of our lives? Are we ever freer than when we

choose to love those who mean to harm us? Because in those moments we are showing forth a better way, a way that offers the hope of peace. We are letting love have the last word.

“Love your enemies.” OK; It is a hard saying. But it is also the hope of the world.

May it be so!

William S. Bray

Some material is sourced from sermons.com; newsletter@christiancentury.org