

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

An elderly woman was getting ready to pull her Cadillac into a parking spot when a young man whipped his red sports car into her spot. When he got out of the car, she rolled down her window and said, “Who do you think you are, Sonny?” He replied. “I’m young and fast, old Lady.” He went into the store and when he came out, he saw this elderly woman ramming her Cadillac into his car again and again. He couldn’t believe what he was seeing and said. “Lady, who do you think you are and what are you doing?” She replied. “I’m old and I’m rich and I’m getting even.”

A soldier who was fighting in Iraq received a letter from his girlfriend telling him she was breaking up with him. She also asked him to return the picture of herself because she wanted to use that picture for her bridal announcement. The soldier was devastated. When he told his buddies about it, one of them came up with an idea. The whole platoon gave him pictures of all their girlfriends and told him to send them to his ex-girlfriend with this note. “For the life of me, I can’t remember which picture is yours, so please remove your picture from all of the other ones I am sending and return the rest of them to me.”

What do both of these stories have in common? They both involve revenge. When someone hurts us, the natural thing for us to do is hurt them back. It’s the old philosophy. “I don’t get mad, I get even.” Many people believe that revenge is sweet. God disagrees. The truth we hear today in all our readings is that God does not want his people to have a hateful or payback attitude. He wants our attitude to be one of love. We have a beautiful example of one of God’s people who was strongly tempted to take vengeance into his own hands and was encouraged to do so. I am talking about David. He showed what it means to love your enemy in the way he dealt with Saul, the king who wanted him dead. God wants us to follow David’s example so he encourages us. **Love your enemies.**

The prophet Samuel had anointed David to be the king to succeed Saul who had become a wicked king. David became known as the giant killer when he killed the nine foot Goliath as the rest of the Israelite soldiers were shaking in their boots. David was a strong military leader who conquered many of their enemies. He also was a musician whom Saul at times would call in to play music that would calm and soothe his mind and heart. David willingly served Saul whenever he was asked and never tried to start a rebellion to overthrow him. In other words, David was a god-fearing man who faithfully served the Lord that led him to faithfully serve Saul, the king.

The same cannot be said about Saul. He saw David as a threat to his throne and wanted David dead. There were a number of attempts made to kill David, some by Saul himself; others by his army and at times by small groups that we might call assassins or hit squads. We have one of these attempts in our text. Saul, along with 3000 men heard that David was in the Desert of Ziph so they went there. David knew that Saul was in the area so he sent out scouts who found out where Saul and his men were camped. One night, David and a soldier named Abishai snuck up on Saul’s camp. To their surprise they discovered that the outer circle of soldiers were all asleep along with the inner circle surrounding Saul. Not one soldier was awake. David saw Saul with his spear in the ground right by his head. Abishai couldn’t believe what he was seeing. There was no doubt in his mind whatsoever as to what they should do. He said to David. **Today God has delivered your enemy into your hands. Now let me pin him to the ground with one thrust of the spear; I won’t strike him twice.** Don’t you think Abishai had a good case? Here was David’s chance. It was no accident that all these men were asleep. It had to be God’s doing so that David could end the life of the one who repeatedly tried to kill him. Here was David’s chance to bring integrity and character back to the nation as a faithful and God-fearing king of Israel. This was a no-brainer.

David didn’t agree and said. **“Don’t destroy him! Who can lay a hand on the LORD’s anointed and be guiltless? As surely as the LORD lives,”** he said, **“the LORD himself will strike him, or his time will come**

and he will die, or he will go into battle and perish. But the LORD forbid that I should lay a hand on the LORD's anointed. Now get the spear and water jug that are near his head, and let's go." Saul was still the king of Israel and David knew he had no right to murder him and take the matter into his own hands. David had complete confidence that God was going to take care of Saul in his own way and at his own time. God would handle the situation much better than David would and David would become king according to God's timetable. That's the confidence and trust David had in God.

This showed even more in the conversation he had with Saul and his army after he and Abishai left the camp. David stood on a high cliff overlooking the place where Saul was camped. He then hollered down to them, pointing out how careless Abner, Saul's commander, had been to fall asleep and leave Saul unguarded. David showed them Saul's spear and told them he could have killed Saul with his own spear but didn't. Then David said to him. **Why is my lord pursuing his servant? What have I done and what wrong am I guilty of?** Saul was now ashamed and spoke words that sounded very sincere. **"I have sinned. Come back, David my son. Because you considered my life precious today, I will not try to harm you again. Surely I have acted like a fool and have been terribly wrong.** David knew Saul could not be trusted so he put the spear down and fled. From what we know, these were the last words spoken between Saul and David.

Let me ask you this. If you had been in David's sandals, would you have resisted the temptation to end the life of someone who was out to kill you? I don't know if I would have. Jesus tells us to love our enemies just like David did. But is Jesus being realistic? For example, parents are to love the person who molested their child? The rape victim is supposed to love the rapist? Love the terrorist who took part in murdering a number of people? Love the person who takes every opportunity to slander our name and hurt us? Seriously? How is that possible?

Great questions. So what's the answer? How can we love our enemies? The Greek word that Jesus uses for love as we heard in our Gospel lesson does not mean to love in the sense of liking or being fond of someone. It's not an emotional love but a love that does not wish them evil but is concerned about their well-being, especially their eternal well-being. Love is really a decision to do good and not harm, sometimes in spite of our feelings.

Isn't that the kind of love God has for us? Think of it this way. Compare the amount of times a person whom you consider to be your enemy has hurt you to the amount of times you have hurt God. You may think that's not comparing apples with apples, that you have never hurt God in the same way that other people have hurt you. Friends, watch out for that way of thinking because it's so easy to downplay our own sinfulness as though God could not be as upset with us as he is with other people. The truth of the matter is we were born enemies of God and show that so often in the way we treat God. Every evil thought, every foul or hurtful word, every selfish and sinful action violates and hurts our holy God. How much wrong haven't you and I done against our God?

So what did God do? Did he say? "I want nothing to do with you. I am not going to bless you. I am going to send you to hell where you belong." No. Instead he said. "I am going to give you a gift, the gift of my one and only Son Jesus. I am going to have him suffer and die for you to forgive all your sins. I am going to have him live and die so that when you die, you can live with me in heaven. I am also going to give you countless earthly blessings as well as do everything necessary to make sure you spend your eternity with me. The way you will get to heaven is through faith in Jesus, faith that the Holy Spirit works in your hearts through another gift of mine, the Gospel in Word and Sacrament."

This is the love our God has for us who don't deserve his love, our God who now tells us to love our enemies. It's not easy to do. The sad thing is that often the people who hurt us the most are members of our own families or people who had been our friends or co-workers. When it comes to how to deal with them, we can learn a lesson from David in our text. How did he show love to Saul who wanted to kill him? He showed love by avoiding Saul at times, not giving Saul opportunities to hurt him and not putting temptations in David's mind to

seek revenge on Saul. It's okay for us to feel the same way. We don't want to fall for the temptation to have hateful thoughts about someone or give them opportunity to hurt us even more. For their sake and ours, we avoid being around them for the time being. At the same time, we pray for them. We pray that as we see the hurt they have caused us, we also see the hurt they cause themselves. We pray for a forgiving spirit, that even though at the time we may be struggling to forgive, that God would help us work through that and give us the peace of sins forgiven. We pray for the strength to do what Paul wrote in our second lesson. **If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.** In other words, when you have the opportunity to be kind or to do something nice for someone who has hurt you, do it. By doing so, you will be showing them the kind of forgiving love God has. You also will be putting them to shame for their bad conduct with the desired result being that they repent of their sins against you.

My friends, just as we at times hurt other people, so other people are going to be mean to us and hurt us. We don't approve, condone, tolerate or minimize our sins or theirs. Just as God hates all evil, so should we his children. What do we do when someone hurts us deeply, and does it again, and again and again? Our knee jerk reaction is to respond with anger and thoughts of revenge? Is that what God wants? To be Christian is to forgive the inexcusable in others because God has forgiven the inexcusable in us. So instead of taking matters into our own hands, leave them in God's hands. Instead of being the judge, trust that God will be the wise and fair judge. Then love your enemies by praying that through the Word, the Holy Spirit will work faith and repentance in their hearts that will then show in their lives. Love your enemies by y looking for opportunities to treat them in a loving and Christian manner. In doing so we will overcome evil with good. In doing so we will experience something far better than revenge. We will experience the peace of God. He will work out all things in his own time and according to his will. God will bless us in the end. You know, God never said being a child of God and living as his children would be easy. He did say though that the blessings are countless and eternal. How blessed we are to be called the children of God! As children of God, love your enemies. Amen.