

7th Sunday of Ordinary Time, February 24, 2019

Love your enemies. Jesus wasn't saying it just to be saying it either. The good news is that the Christ died, loving his enemies. Jesus didn't just say it; he lived it. He calls us to do the same.

I remember the story of a farmer who had a neighbor, who was more enemy than friend. His neighbor had a vicious dog, a dog that threatened him and his family. He drove over to ask his neighbor to at least keep the dog on a leash or pen him up, but his plea was met with ridicule and scorn. "It's a free country. I'll do as I please with my dog."

And then it happened. The man arrived home one day to find that the neighbor's dog was at the throat of his young son. He pulled the dog off his son, rushed him to the hospital in his pick-up, but his son tragically died. The man was grief-stricken. His other neighbors were angry, and shortly thereafter, the dog was found dead, poisoned.

Not long after it was planting season. Everyone refused to sell the bitter farmer with the evil dog any seed for his crops. While everyone was busy planting, the hated man could only stew in his anger. But then to everyone's surprise, when the crops began to grow, the hated neighbor's crops came up as well. Nearby, sat one of his neighbor's fields...empty. The man who had lost his only beloved son, had done the unthinkable. He had helped out his neighbor, the enemy. Over the years the two became the best of friends. The hatred of the entire community melted.

Jesus asks us to love our enemies: to do good to them, to bless them, to pray for them. He illustrates for them how to do good: turn the other cheek, give them your shirt as well as your coat, give to all who beg and don't demand a return of what has been taken. All of Jesus' directives are summed up in what has come to be known as the Golden Rule: "Do to others what you would have them do to you."

Through the centuries, this ethic has been given voice in different ways by a variety of people, such as Rabbi Hillel: "What is hateful to you, do not to another." (David's response to Saul) Philo of Alexandria: "What you hate to suffer, do not do to anyone else"; Socrates: "What things make you angry when you suffer them at the hands of others, do not you do to other people"; Confucius: "Is there one word which may serve as a rule of practice for all one's life? Is not reciprocity such a word? What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others."

In each of these ethics, the form is negative. The Christian ethic as expressed in Luke's gospel is positive. "Love ^{your enemies} ~~one another~~. Love in this passage is not a noun or an emotional state; it is an action. I might not feel like loving my enemy, but I can still do it. If I want to follow the Christ, I do it with my action.

→ How can we love our enemies?

Pretty innocent but very tough words to live from Jesus. The good news is that he's already done it for all of us. May we do the same...right here...right now.