

“Love Your Enemy”

The rev. drew Willard
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Rally Day Potluck & Storyfest

Jeremiah 29:1,4-7

Luke 17:11-19

On the way to Jerusalem [Jesus] was passing along between Sama'ria and Galilee.

Luke 17:11

Let us pray... O God,

May we be open to love those who are different from us despite our ignorance and fear,
and even to love our enemies as we trust you love us.

Amen

When I was in the service and attending the US Army Signal Officer Advanced Course,
we had many officers from other countries enrolled for training.

These exchange students included three colonels from the Egyptian army
as well as a colonel from the Israeli Army.

I only remember seeing the 3 Egyptians and the Israeli talk together one time,
though they appeared to be very cordial with each other.

This was after the Yom Kippur War of 1973 and
the historic Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty of 1979.

One of the Egyptian officers confided to me that this war had been very costly –
especially in lives lost, and that Egypt was tired of war with Israel.

There was a Pakistani colonel who was very well-spoken and congenial –
and I have wondered from time to time what has happened to him
over the years upon his return to Pakistan – especially, since 2001.

Our class also had an army captain from the Republic of Korea,
who told me he had been stationed on the Demilitarized Zone
between his country and North Korea.

One time, he recalled looking out at that no man's land
and seeing a bird fly back and forth across the border.

he wondered to himself, 'Now, why can't I do that?'

I also remember a Canadian major telling me that one thing he couldn't forgive
about Americans, is that we know nothing about Canada's history.

There's an expression that says, 'good fences make for good neighbors',
but perhaps that's not true when the border between people is in their minds.

In today's Gospel story, Jesus was walking through the border land
between Galilee and Samaria.

The differences between the Jews of Galilee and the Samaritans
goes back more than a thousand years earlier from Jesus' time.

In our current Bible study class,

Ken Rhoades will be presenting the historic roots of that division.

Willard, p.2

It is in the context of those times – and the cultural prejudice that arose as a result against the Samaritans, which makes this Gospel story especially significant.

In the course of Jesus' teachings about the Kingdom of Heaven, we also find a blueprint for a 'beloved community' on Earth. Themes of personal salvation and social justice are intertwined throughout the Bible.

For example, Jesus often teaches about the problem of prejudice, which touches upon one of the most basic problems of our human condition. If we can come to terms with our prejudices, we will be saving ourselves as individuals, and as communities.

Jesus demonstrates that a generosity born of the Spirit is able to cross ethnic and religious borders.

In other stories about Jesus, he heals a servant in a Roman centurion's household, as well as a Greek woman's daughter and a man with a 'legion' of demons. Jesus led by example in helping those whom the Jewish people of his time demonized as enemies – including Samaritans.

It is not clear who the ten lepers are – though at least one of them is a Samaritan and by telling them to go show themselves to the priests, some if not all the rest, are Galilean Jews.

Still, it is ironic that illness unites them as being outcast from both the Galilean and Samaritan societies.

Yet, the one who realizes he is healed is the Samaritan and he comes back across that cultural divide to praise God and thank Jesus.

This division is not simply about ethnic and religious divisions – There was a great fear in Jesus' day that leprosy was more contagious than it actually is.

Fear of leprosy was like the fear of AIDS in our time – especially, whenever people don't fully understand how such a disease is spread.

Prejudice in such circumstances can take the form of blaming the victim for bringing it upon themselves, placing a border between *us* and *them* to block the threat they represent.

One of the greatest messages of the good news of Jesus Christ is a variation of the Golden Rule:

Do unto others, as you would have them do unto you, which itself is derived from the Great Commandment to love God and love one another as oneself.

That variation of the Golden Rule is:
Love your enemy.

Willard, p.3

This does not mean worship your enemy or
compromise yourself to appease your enemy,
but to love your enemy as you would love your neighbor,
or as you would hope to be treated yourself.

There are people with whom it is very difficult to get along –
I'm sure you've come across someone like that in your life.
But as Christians, we have the obligation to hold out for the possibility
that your enemies are no less, nor more than, as human as yourself.

Rooted in this concept of loving your enemy,
is a willingness to *forgive* others whether they seek to be forgiven or not.
Forgiveness does not assume absolution of someone's responsibility for their actions –
but forgiveness calls for the determination to seek out the humanity
in those we might otherwise call an 'enemy'.
This means challenging our prejudices against what we don't understand,
challenging our fears, and challenging our hatreds.

In our Hebrew scripture lesson today,
the Prophet Jeremiah was speaking in a time of great social turmoil
when the people of the southern kingdom of Judah
were carried off into Babylonian exile.
Imagine the bitterness of having one's country dismantled
and its people taken into captivity.

Yet, Jeremiah said:

*Pray for peace in Babylonia and work hard to make it prosperous.
The more successful that nation is, the better off you will be.*

Jeremiah 29:7

Jeremiah advised them to be good citizens in the land of their enemy
in the hopes of living in peace with them.
It is the same strategy with which Jesus would send out his apostles
to bring the Good News throughout the Roman Empire and establish the Church.

Going back to the program of training foreign officers in American military schools –
this provided opportunities for creating professional relationships
and even friendships, getting to know one another beyond cultural division.
With the United States as neutral territory for social interaction,
the potential was there for persons of conflicting nationalities
to see the humanity of one another – and even learn to love one's enemy.

This same concept was effectively applied as a peacemaking technique
to promote change in Northern Ireland through a remarkable program called
The Ulster Project.

Willard, p.4

I first became aware of this program in the mid-1980s –
though the Ulster Project has been active since 1975,
in which children from Northern Ireland, who were the same gender,
one Protestant and one Catholic –
would live with an American family for one month.

The youth participants are between the ages of 14 and 16,
unaffiliated with political organizations, and screened for leadership potential
to help in their respective communities upon their return.

It is a program that continues to this day as an active example
for teaching the next generation to love and transform an enemy into a friend.

This week, it was announced that the Nobel Peace Prize
did not go to Malala Yousafzai,

She is the 14 year-old Pakistani girl who had been shot by a Taliban man
for her personal campaign through the internet, in support of education for girls.
She survived and has since recovered after 2 years of treatment.

This summer, she made a dramatic address to the United Nations
and has been back in our country this week to visit our president
and make several media appearances.

She is still a threat to the Taliban because she herself is an example of the idea that
girls and women can be empowered through education.

If nothing else was accomplished, in the midst of all these terrible wars
in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria and other uprisings of the Arab Spring,
perhaps Malala's witness is the greatest achievement to bring about change.

Malala said that if she were to face the man who shot her, she would say,

*" You must not treat others with cruelty...,
you must fight others but through peace and through dialogue
and through education.'*

*Then I said I will tell him how important education is and that
'I even want education for your children as well.'*

And I will tell him,

"That's what I want to tell you, now do what you want."

In her address to the UN, Malala acknowledged those who were her inspiration to her
for compassion, change, and the philosophy of nonviolence.

These included Jesus, as well as Mohammed, Buddha, Martin Luther King,
Nelson Mandela, Gandhi, Mother Teresa, and others.

She also said,

*And this is the forgiveness that I have learnt from my mother and father.
This is what my soul is telling me, be peaceful and love everyone."*

We must have the conviction that to love our enemy, is – at the same time,
to hope that God loves us, even when we have been less than loving.

Here is a Muslim girl living the Christ-like virtue of love your enemies.

How much more so should we as Christians seek to do the same?

Amen

*Our lesson today is from Jeremiah 29:1-2,4-7 and
describes the time of Babylonian exile.*

*In his letters to those Judean people who had been carried away
from their homeland,*

*Jeremiah offered encouragement and advice
while they were in this captive situation...*

[The Prophet Jeremiah said,]

29 ¹⁻² I had been left in Jerusalem when

King Nebuchadnezzar [Ne' boo-chad-nezzar]

took many of the people of Jerusalem and Judah

to Babylonia as prisoners, including King Jehoiachin,

his mother, his officials, and the metal workers

and others in Jerusalem who were skilled in making things.

So I wrote a letter to the prophets, the priests, the leaders,

and the rest of our people in Babylonia.

⁴ that the LORD All-Powerful, the God of Israel, had said:

I had you taken from Jerusalem to Babylonia.

Now I tell you ⁵ to settle there and build houses.

Plant gardens and eat what you grow in them.

⁶ Get married and have children,

then help your sons find wives and help your daughters find husbands,

so they can have children as well.

I want your numbers to grow, not to get smaller.

⁷ Pray for peace in Babylonia and work hard to make it prosperous.

The more successful that nation is, the better off you will be.

Inspired by Luke 17:11-19

And it came about as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem,
that he passed between Samaria and Galilee.

So, entering a particular village,
he encountered ten men with leprosy.

Keeping their distance, they called out, saying,
'Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!'

Then, seeing them, Jesus said,
'Go show yourselves to the priests.'

And it came about as they went, they were cured.

But one of them, realizing that he was cured,
returned, shouting praise to God,
and knelt face down at Jesus' feet, thanking him.

Now, he was a Samaritan.

And Jesus responded, saying,

'Weren't ten healed?

So, where are the other nine?

Aren't there any more of them to be found to praise God
besides a person from another country?'

And Jesus said to him,

'Arise and go. Your faith has healed you.'

Luke 17:11-19 [RSV]

[11] On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Sama'ria and Galilee.

[12] And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance

[13] and lifted up their voices and said,

"Jesus, Master, have mercy on us."

[14] When he saw them he said to them,

"Go and show yourselves to the priests."

And as they went they were cleansed.

[15] Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back,
praising God with a loud voice;

[16] and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks.

Now he was a Samaritan.

[17] Then said Jesus,

"Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine?"

[18] Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?"

[19] And he said to him,

"Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well."