

October 15, 2017

The Radical Sayings of Jesus
Love Your Enemies
Luke 6:27-31

Opening words: Today, I continue my sermon series called *The Radical Sayings of Jesus*. You know the truth. Most read the Bible selectively. There are certain things we have read countless times. We read them continuously because they comfort us. However, there are other passages in the Bible we have never read because we find them hard to understand or harsh to our ears. It is true of the entire Bible, including the Gospels. We try to ignore certain words from the Master. The truth be told, there are certain things we wish Jesus had never said. They are just too radical. This is the problem: We can't dismiss those words, because they came from Jesus. We must wrestle with them. We must not just understand them; we must apply them to our daily lives. Today's radical saying of Jesus is a fine example. In our scripture reading for today, Jesus tells us to love our enemies. Let's just be honest. That is hard to do. There is no other way to say it. Jesus's words for us today seem extreme.

Webster defines an enemy in two ways. First, an enemy can be a person, such as a person who is actively opposed or hostile to someone or something. Second, an enemy can be a political group that is actively hostile to another political group. I would like to say none of us have enemies, but I do not want to lie. How we handle our enemies says more about us than them. How we handle our enemies says a great deal about our spiritual maturity. Our scripture reading for today is Luke 6:27-31. Let me call this message today, *Love Your Enemies*.

Luke 6:27-31 ²⁷ "But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. ²⁹ If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. ³⁰ Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. ³¹ Do to others as you would have them do to you.

Saint Francis of Assisi once prayed, "*Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace; where there is hatred, let me sow love.*" And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"

We find ourselves today in the sixth chapter of Luke. Our reading for today comes from the Sermon on the Mount. Do you remember the background of this section? We looked at it a few weeks ago. Jesus is in Galilee, which means his popularity is high. The Master ascends to a high piece of land, not to escape the crowd, but to be heard by the crowd. From that lofty position, the Master teaches them about the Kingdom of God. He sets the bar high by giving them the Beatitudes. You remember. Blessed are the poor. Blessed are the hungry. Blessed are those who weep, and the rest. Those

words are an unobtainable goal. Our reading for today comes just behind those timeless words. The standard remains high in the Kingdom of God.

In verse twenty-seven Jesus says, *"Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you."* There is nothing difficult about these words. They are straightforward. You do not need an advanced degree to unlock some hidden meaning. They are as clear as clear can be. Jesus expects us to love our enemies. However, those words run contrary to our society. Many find it much easier to hate. We would like to dismiss these words but we can't do it. Why? Because, they are Jesus's words and we are disciples of Jesus Christ. Our goal is to be like Jesus. If Jesus said, love your enemies, we must love our enemies. We have no excuse for not trying, because Jesus loved his enemies. Let me ask you this uncomfortable question: How many enemies do you have in your world? If that question makes you think, say, **"Amen!"**

Who are your political enemies? It is a good question. It is the same question the people at Gallup asked Americans. Their results were released in February 2016.

American listed eight different countries as enemies. Here are the top four:

North Korea – 16%

Russia – 15%

Iran – 14%

China -12%

Number five were the countries in which Isis operates. Do you agree those four countries are our enemies? Is there another country you would like to add to the list? This is the problem: You are a disciple of Jesus Christ and Jesus told us to love our enemies. Are you willing to love those countries, or do you as a disciple of Jesus Christ have some work to do? If you are willing to at least pray for our political enemies, say, **"Amen!"** Our country has political enemies. Our community also has enemies.

Who are your community's enemies? It is a good question. This is one of the saddest stories I have heard in a long time. Kristen O'Conner and June Schweinhart were friends. The two young women did not meet in school. They met in drug rehab. It may have been they had a common interest. It may have been that they were both pregnant. When rehab ended they stayed in touch. Earlier this week the two women got together with their newborns. Things did not go well. Before the day was done, the two were overdosing in the front seat of a car as the newborns sat in their car seats in the back. It is safe to say that rehab did not work for the women. Drugs have become such a big part of our society. Everyone seems to know someone on drugs. Everyone seems to know someone who died prematurely because of drugs. Many people believe the dark organizations who are providing the drugs are our community's enemy. They may be right. It is easy to hate those organizations and those local drug dealers. This is the problem: You are a disciple of Jesus Christ and Jesus told us to love our enemies. Are you willing to love those drug dealers, or do you have some work to do? If you are willing to at least pray for our community's enemies, say, **"Amen!"** Our country has

political enemies. Our community has enemies. Be honest with yourself. You have personal enemies. The Bible is filled with personal enemies. Let me give you just two.

Do you remember the story of Cain and Abel? They were the sons of Adam and Eve. The boys could have had a great life, but their parents ate from the fruit of the tree. For this sin they were expelled from the Garden of Eden. Forced to work for a living, Abel became a shepherd and Cain a farmer. In time, the boys brought their offerings to the Lord. Cain, the farmer, brought some fruit. Abel, the shepherd, brought fresh meat. The Lord looked at both the fruit and meat and favored the meat. (So would I.) Cain grew jealous of his brother and killed him. It is not surprising that the first murder in the history of the world occurred within a family unit. We are expected to love our family members, but it doesn't always happen. Do you have a family member who you hate? Do you have a family member who hates you?

Do you remember the story of Joseph, the well-built handsome young man? He knew what it was like to have enemies within his own family. He was one of twelve brothers. Can you imagine having eleven brothers? Can you imagine having eleven brothers when you are your father's favorite? To demonstrate his favored status, Jacob, their father, gives Joseph the famous coat of many colors. That coat was more than his brothers could handle, so they came up with a plan. The brothers tell their father, Jacob, that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal. The truth is, Joseph, the dreamer, was sold into slavery. In the end, it all worked out for Joseph, but for a while Joseph had some difficult days. I have always marveled at the fact that Joseph was able to forgive his brothers and mend the family's wounds. You can ask Joseph and he will tell you, it is easy to have enemies within the family.

Who are your personal enemies? Your personal enemy can be a family member. Your personal enemy can be a neighbor. Your personal enemy can be a fellow worker or classmate. It is easy to hate those people, but this is the problem: You are a disciple of Jesus Christ and Jesus told us to love our enemies. Are you willing to love that person, or do you have some work to do? If you are willing to at least pray for those personal enemies, say, "**Amen!**" Our country has political enemies. Our community has enemies. You have personal enemies. This last question is the hardest one to tackle.

Have you ever felt like your own worst enemy? What is it about yourself you hate? Everyone has something. Does anyone here wish they were thinner? Does anyone here wish they were taller? Does anyone here wish they were younger? Does anyone here wish they were smarter? Does anyone here wish they could stop spending? Does anyone here wish they could stop smoking? Does anyone here wish they could stop drinking? Does anyone here wish they could stop being so negative and critical? Does anyone here wish they could stop gossiping? Does anyone here wish they were braver? Does anyone here have a hard time loving their most personal enemy, themselves? Do you like the person you are? When was the last time you prayed for yourself? If that makes you think, say, "**Amen!**"

Recently, PBS aired a ten-part series on the Vietnam War. In total, it lasted eighteen hours. They interviewed more than eighty eyewitnesses from all sides of the conflict. I was interested in the topic because I was fifteen years old when it ended. There was much I wanted to learn. In my opinion, the first episode was the best. It covered approximately 100 years of Vietnamese history – how the French colonized Vietnam and how the United States got involved in Vietnam. I wanted to watch all ten episodes but I couldn't do it. The topic was too heavy and sad. This is what I learned that still haunts me. In 1962, President Kennedy told an aide, it was an unwinnable war. It lasted ten more years. We stayed in Vietnam for two reasons, Cold War fears and national arrogance. The war was unwinnable for a variety of reasons. One of the greatest problems in the war was that our soldiers couldn't identify the enemy. Anyone could have been their enemy, men and women, young and old. This next line disturbs me. Innocent people died because they couldn't identify the true enemy. The soldiers on the ground felt like they were constantly surrounded by the enemy. They learned to hate everyone. Maybe that is one of the reasons we struggle with Jesus's words for today? We are surrounded by our enemies, and in the end, we hate everyone. You know better.

You are a disciple of Jesus Christ. That means you are trying to be more like Jesus all the time. That means you must listen to what Jesus said and apply it to your life. Jesus said, love your enemies! It runs contrary to our world, but we must try. Saint Francis of Assisi once prayed, *"Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace; where there is hatred, let me sow love."* And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**