

There are times when we have enemies.

When this occurs, the scripture gives us an example of how to engage those we call enemies to be beloved children of God.

There's a bunch of people living in tents in our city parks and on vacant lots. There are people who want them gone and they are making that happen with city bylaws and police actions and harassment. These 'tent people' want to find a way to solve problems in their lives. The 'tent people' don't have enemies, they just have problems. These people have been persecuted for wanting a better life. The existence of the solution that the 'tent people' have resolved feels very threatening to some of us. The 'tent people' don't have an enemy, they have a problem. Those of us feeling threatened have an enemy.

Mahatma Ghandi was beleaguered by people who wanted him dead and they made that happen with a gun. Mahatma Ghandi had a cause. The people who hated him had an enemy.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr was harassed and finally murdered by people who wanted him dead and they made that happen with a gun. Dr. King didn't have enemies. Dr. King had a cause. The people who hated and persecuted him had an enemy.

During the second world war the very existence of the Jewish population in Europe was threatened. There were people who wanted them dead, and those people made that happen with guns and starvation and torture. The Jewish people were just trying to survive, as so many people in our world are trying to do today. The Jewish people didn't have enemies, they simply had a need to survive. The people who hated the Jewish population had an enemy.

Saint Stephen, known as the first Christian martyr, was murdered for speaking his truth, his prophesy. There were people who wanted him dead, and they made that happen with a relentless stoning. St. Stephen didn't have enemies. St. Stephen only had a cause. It was the people who hated him who had an enemy.

Jesus on the cross ... hung by his flesh to be murdered a slow and tortuous death, screamed at by people who hated him ... people intent on his death. Jesus' response to this, "Father, forgive them." Jesus didn't have enemies. Jesus had only forgiveness. The people who hated Jesus, for whatever their reason, had an enemy.

Those that have problems in this world of inequality and unjustness often feel that they need to push on the edges to solve their problem. You and I, those privileged 'haves' are often the ones that feel pushed on, feel persecuted, feel like we have enemies.

When such occurs, we can hate and lash out, or we can look to God in scripture to learn how to deal with a world where we have enemies.

How do we step into the truth of our authentic power by acknowledging that loving is that power? The question is, how can we deal with those we call enemies?

I just want to make a few points

1.Understand WHO is "Enemy"

Can you imagine Jesus trying to get his disciples to understand. He's been through the Beatitudes, "You are the salt of the earth and the light of the world' ... stay that way, don't be angry with your brother ... get reconciled; lusting in your heart is still lusting; how you feel and think is so important ... How many examples can I think of to help you understand?" says Jesus. And yet, Jesus comes up with one more ... Just don't have an enemy. Who you hate is your choice. Just don't hate. The enemy is who you decide they are. Just stop making enemies.

As we take a dive in the scripture today, a study of the word, teaches that an enemy, ECHTHON especially as it is used in Luke 6, is "one to whom a person is hostile". So, as we explore our enemy, we need to remember that 'enemy' is someone that toward whom we are hostile.

There's a nursery rhyme that goes,
Little Miss Muffet sat on a tuffet
Eating her curds and whey
Along came a spider and sat down beside her
And frightened Miss Muffet away
The dear spider was just trying to get some lunch, and our Miss Muffet has a hissy fit, seeing that spider's solution as her problem.

We have choices about who is our enemy. When someone threatens our safety, first give one thought to why they are pushing on you. What exactly is being pushed? Maybe it's just our sense of the status quo that is being threatened. Perhaps there is a change coming and we all know how unhappy CHANGE makes us. Those people in those tents are living life differently than you and I, but they are children of God.

It's called a RULE OF GOLD for a reason ... IT'S OUR TREASURE.

2.The 'other' is not a barrier or an opportunity 2

Can you imagine Jesus deciding, against all common sense, against all that he knew to be true, to be give love to people just because God told him to? Can you imagine how he struggled to explain this to his brand new disciples? Perhaps it went like this, " I know you have always known that these people are the barrier to your peace, and I know you have every right to feel that that way... they've been pretty mean. But here's the new deal. God wants us to love them, forgive them, be compassionate to them. Questions? Yes, we must talk with them? Yes we must eat with them. Pretty much whatever you used to do, don't do. People are NOT a barrier to your peace. People are not a chance to get ahead. People are not evil. I know it sounds crazy but ... let's just get started. Follow me."

Culture - the Middle East of Jesus' time laden with the rules of reciprocity. There were three kinds of reciprocity: general reciprocity ... sharing with no hope of return, like how parents treat our children; There is balanced reciprocity... where you get what you give. We would love who loved us first, we would do good for those who had done good for us first, we would lend so that we could borrow sometime, we would invite someone to eat so that they would have to invite us back. Then, there was negative reciprocity ... trying to get something for nothing, cheating the other of any return. It was a culture full of reciprocity and Jesus says, NO. That's not the Kingdom of God.

" ... do good, and lend, expecting nothing back; and your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for God is kind toward the unthankful and evil

ART: Mr. Paul Simon said it in a beautiful song about 'friendship' and he never once said that a debt would be incurred, or that we were better because we helped, or that the focus of our helping would help us back one day. He just said, "When you're weary, feelin' small; When times get rough; when you're down and out; when darkness comes, if you need a friend I'm sailing right behind. Like a bridge over troubled water I will ease your mind."

People are not barriers to our wellness and people are not opportunities for us to use for your success, or happiness or peace or wealth. All people are just the beloved of God. When we see each person as a child of God, when we "lend, expecting nothing back; our reward will be great, and we will be children of the Most High."

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3. Seek the 'other'

There is our Jesus having lived his whole life in world of people who he's been taught are enemies. He isn't to trust them because God told his ancestors to stay away from them. Then somehow he sees that all people are God's people and if that's true what is the truth of his entire life? His entire life is in question. Can you imagine coming to understand that the meaning of your entire life is not true? We are used to the stories of Jesus' healing, but remember, he has travelled from 'enemy' to beloved and must do this every single day almost every time he turns a corner, there's another decision to be made. So, he begins to look for those people who used to be 'bad', maybe to practice, maybe to get to know them, but certainly to realign an entire life's behaviour and smash the stereotypes of his life.

Of course, there are differences among people today ... difference in customs and religions and , but in Jesus' time, the stakes were even higher for the Judeans. They lived in a bubble that isolated them from just about everybody. Stereotypes were the comfortable order of the day. Samaritans were all horrible, Nazarenes were all uncouth and Romans were all vicious. Jesus was working very hard to bring himself, first, and then his kin into the world of their siblings under a God of love and compassion for all.

"For if you love them that love you, what credit is that to you?" (Luke 6:32) It's easy to feel comfortable around those like us. Paul McCartney wrote a song that says,

"Ebony and ivory live together in perfect harmony
Side by side on my piano keyboard, oh Lord, why don't we?
We all know that people are the same wherever you go
There is good and bad in ev'ryone
We learn to live, when we learn to give
Each other what we need to survive, together alive
Ebony and ivory live together in perfect harmony
Side by side on my piano keyboard, oh Lord why don't we?"

If we're looking for it ... and I pray we are looking for it ... we might begin to notice when we are avoiding people who live in tents, or who have accents, or the lady wearing the hijab, or maybe we're hating the leadership in the United States, or perhaps we're hating, or fearful of those millions of people that voted for that leadership. Maybe when we talk about the state of the world, we spew our hatred on the fascist right of the American political party, maybe we read those articles that talk about a patriotic, American, religious right as they rewrite scripture to suit their venomous motives of hatred and superiority.

Here's the truly hard part of being Christian,

^{6:31} "As you would like people to do to you, do exactly so to them. The GOLDEN RULE

^{:36} Therefor be merciful, even as our Creator is also merciful. ^{6:37} Don't judge, and you won't be judged. Don't condemn, and you won't be condemned. Set free, and you will be set free. Forgive, and you will be forgiven;

Seek these opportunities to where you might judge, where you might condemn, where you might fear ...

Because

give, and it will be given to you, good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over will be put into your lap for the measure you give will be the measure you get back."

It's called a RULE OF GOLD for a reason ... IT'S OUR TREASURE

So, the path is not easy. Jesus robbed us of every last excuse to withhold kindness from anybody at all. The path to follow God's instruction is to offer kindness to all people. And let me tell you, loving all people is pretty easy if we are sitting in our living room all alone, but that's not what we're told. Jesus went out and purposefully engaged the dirty, the noisy, the conservatives and the green, the republicans the democrats, the Catholics and the seventh day Adventists, the people who live in tents and the people who see the world as so scary that they just scream all the time.

Have faith in the way of God and shine your light on that person at the office that is truly annoying ... you know, the one that tried to get you fired. Shine your light on the followers who are trudging behind a powerful person with an agenda that surely appears hateful and narrow and backward. Shining your light doesn't tolerate evil, it exposes it and covers it with the love of God. A prayer for those who abuse, is an act to stop the abuse.

God is the master OF THE GOLDEN RULE... do unto others as you would have them do unto you". Jesus is the teacher of the GOLDEN RULE. Holy Spirit is the voice of the GOLDEN RULE . It's called the GOLDEN RULE for a reason ... its our TREASURE.