

Alan Baughcum

Sermon: Love Your Neighbor as Yourself

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Exodus 12:1-14, Romans 13:8-14

What a time we live in! Does not feel like any other time we may have lived through ... Feels like everything is changing, as if nothing remains the same, and that it is hard to hope for better.

BUT, you knew there was a "BUT" coming, didn't you?

BUT ... The prophet Isaiah was right when he said, "All people are like grass and all beauty is like the flowers of the field. Grass withers and the flowers fade, but only the Word of God endures forever."

The Word of God endures forever.

The Word of God made flesh, who came to us as a baby, who lived, taught, suffered and died for us ... Jesus ... Jesus has been resurrected to eternal life. Jesus lives for all time.

Jesus embodied, lived, and taught us that steadfast love of God. ... The Hebrew word is *khesed* ... The steadfast love of God never ends (Lam 3:22-23)

Paul writes to the Romans that followers of Jesus are, like Jesus himself, to love everyone.

Love, God's love, is not mere sentimentality, mere emotion. God's love is who God is. God's love is also a decision by God to create and to love God's Creation. So also with us, love is our decision as to how we will behave towards others. We are to behave towards them in a loving way, in the same way that God has loved us and all of God's Creation.

And, sometimes, when we run out of love and our decision to love one another begins to falter ... Sometimes, we need to turn back to God and give ourselves over to God, to be renewed and to be strengthened ... even as we are about to do at the Lord's table this morning.

Right now, Americans seem to be a very divided people. It is not enough to disagree. Everyone seems to make those who disagree with them into the enemy, and that we need to portray them as hateful and unreasoning, perhaps even as something less than fully human.

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That is dangerous thinking. That is dangerous behavior. That is un-Christian behavior, unloving behavior.

Let me share with you the testimony of Corrie ten Boom. Corrie ten Boom was a Dutch woman who, with her family, was imprisoned in a Nazi concentration camp because she and they sheltered and helped persecuted Jews. Her family died in the camp. She survived.

After leaving the concentration camp and becoming a Christian evangelist, she preached all around the world, including in Germany. On one occasion when she was preaching in Germany, There was in the audience a guard from the concentration camp where her sister died ...

He came up to me as the church was emptying, beaming and bowing. "How grateful I am for your message, Fraulein." he said, "To think that, as you say, He has washed my sins away!" His hand was thrust out to shake mine. And I, who had preached so often to the people in [the refugee center] the need to forgive, kept my hand at my side.

Even as the angry, vengeful thoughts boiled through me, I saw the sin of them. Jesus Christ had died for this man; was I going to ask for more? Lord Jesus, I prayed, forgive me and help me to forgive him.

I tried to smile, I struggled to raise my hand. I could not. I felt nothing, not the slightest spark of warmth or charity. And so again I breathed a silent prayer. Jesus, I cannot forgive him. Give me Your forgiveness.

As I took his hand the most incredible thing happened. From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand a current seemed to pass from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me.

And so, I discovered that it is not on our forgiveness any more than on our goodness that the world's healing hinges, but on [Jesus']. When [Jesus] tells us to love our enemies, He gives, along with the command, the love itself."

(See Corrie Ten Boom, *The Hiding Place*.)

God loves us with a steadfast love and sends us that love and its peace through Jesus Christ. He expects us, just as Paul wrote, to share that love and peace with everyone we meet.

I know that is hard. It may seem especially hard during this time of testing an especially foul and nasty election season.

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Hear therefore this closing prayer for our enemies ...

Adapted from...

[A Prayer for Your Enemies](#)

Lord Jesus, following Your example and command, today we pray for those who disagree with us, for those who oppose us, and for those who apparently seek to be our enemies. Saturate our lives with your Holy Spirit's power and might. Send Your love flowing through us and forgive us for holding on to anything that could hinder our prayers. We release any unforgiveness, thoughts of revenge, or hateful emotions that can quench Your Spirit in our hearts.

Give us wisdom as we seek how to bless, to love, and to pray for our enemies. Bless our enemies and orchestrate events in their lives that will leave their hearts exposed to you. Give them a poverty of spirit that recognizes their deep need for You. We pray they will discover Your comfort in times of mourning. In your way and in your time, humble them to your will.

Show them your mercy, knowing we were all enemies of God before You extended mercy to us. Guide them ... and us ... that all of us will be merciful to others.

Lord, we pray that we and they will hunger and thirst for Your purity and righteousness, become advocates of Your justice and that our warring spirits will be changed into peacemaking. Remove our façade of well-being; tear down the lies that deceive; show them, as you have shown your people, the futility of opposing God's kingdom. Light up their darkness and show them the true reasons for their behavior and resulting consequences. Reveal to them any deep hurts or traumas in their own lives that may be contributing to their destructive actions.

Softens stony hearts, open blind eyes, and help them realize their ultimate neediness for You. In some way, let them witness Your power and recognize that You are the source of true love and peace. Pursue them, even allowing goodness to lead them to repentance. And give us patience and a deep trust in You, Lord, even when we can't see any change in our enemies. When we waver, not wanting to pray for our enemies, help us to remember Your grace in our own lives, and our complete dependence on You.

Amen.