

“But love your enemies, do good,  
and lend expecting nothing in return.” AMEN!

The Bible is full of sibling rivalry.

It is real, we know siblings fight and  
in the worst of situations might even  
kill one another.

In less extreme situations they mock and deceive.

We began this morning with the  
story of Joseph and his brothers in Egypt.

If you recall from Sunday School,  
you’ll remember that Joseph’s brothers  
were jealous of him.

He got the famous coat from dad;  
he was given all the attention and  
the easiest chores because he was  
the youngest.

Then on top of all that Joseph began  
to tell his brothers about his dreams.

The brothers interpreted those dreams to mean  
that Joseph would one day rule over them.

How dare he share such a dream!

Little brother ruling over bigger brother!

It was the final straw and the older brothers  
were ready to extinguish the little runt.

Thankfully, a voice of reason came  
from one of them, Reuben said,

“Shed no blood, let’s throw him in a pit.”

Not exactly the best savior or advocate  
but Reuben’s plan was to come back and  
take Joseph home to safety.

No sooner they’d decided to follow Reuben’s plan  
when in the distance they saw  
a caravan of Ishmaelites coming toward them  
and the brothers devised a new plan.

Sell him!

Make a few bucks *and* be rid of him.

It was a win-win, right?

Well, except for Joseph!

Joseph was taken to Egypt and  
the brothers went home to tell  
their father, Jacob, that his beloved son  
must have been killed by a wild animal.

It was a lie they'd have to keep for a long time.

We know this is an extreme story,  
but we also know that siblings will fight.

Time passed, as it tends to do, and Joseph  
became an important leader in Egypt.

A famine came to the land of Israel and  
the brothers went to Egypt to find food and  
ask for help.

When they get to Egypt they come face to face  
with Joseph but do not recognize him.

We, the readers, are ready for a good  
dose of retaliation and the stage is set  
when Joseph plants a valuable silver cup  
in Benjamin's sack so that it looked  
like he'd stolen it.

Oh, it gets juicy as we think of the way  
the brothers squirm with worry and have

to return home to home to once again  
tell the bad news to their father.

But they are getting what they deserve.

We expect retaliation from the former victim  
and sweet justice to play out for the one who  
had been wronged.

When Joseph revealed himself to his brothers  
they also expected to get the violence due  
to them.

The Bible told us they were silent, terrified,  
because their evil plan done long ago was  
coming around to them and they knew  
they were getting what they'd deserved.

But Joseph does something quite unanticipated.

He responded to their fear by revealing  
a surprising new perspective.

Instead of focusing on the harm done to him  
and getting retribution for the evil intent  
the brothers had against him,

he focused instead on asserting God's role  
in the things they had done.

Maybe, just maybe, what the brothers  
had unknowingly and uncaringly done was  
a part of the plan God had to save many lives.

The cycle of retaliation was broken when  
Joseph saw God at work even in the evil  
things that sibling do to one another. (Pause)

While the story gives us a surprise ending  
for us to think about, we might also be  
recognizing that there are both benefits  
and dangers in this kind of theology.

The benefit is what I have already mentioned.

The cycle of retaliation was broken.

The one-up-man-ship ceased because  
violence begets violence and  
Joseph played a sort of God-figure here  
noting the way God forgives  
the wrongs we commit.

Yet, we may be sensing that there is  
danger in this kind theology, too.

The consequence of believing God to  
make positive the evil actions of people  
is problematic.

An example is “the justification of slaughter and slavery of millions of Black people as being part of God’s plan to spread the gospel and save souls.”

Another is the expansion into the Americas at the expense of the Indians because they were labeled “savages,” and required saving.

It is a dangerous road to interpret Joseph’s “God-talk” to mean the greater good justifies the evil actions and hurtful intentions of people because of God’s “larger plan.”

This story from Genesis is, in my opinion, to be viewed not in the larger context of God making our poor behaviors good but instead as a paradigm of forgiveness.

Few people would be as forgiving as Joseph was to his brothers.

Few have the capability to love that much. (Pause)

The concept of love is continued in our gospel lesson from Luke, too.

In this section we find the continuation of Jesus’ Sermon on the Plain.

As we digest these two paragraphs,  
it is good to be mindful of the size of  
the crowd that Jesus preached to.

It was to a great crowd on a level place.

Not only was Jesus down at their level (our level)  
but this crowd was also on a level plain.

God saw them equally and openly.

What began with a multitude of people eager  
to hear what Jesus would say might have  
thinned out a bit, by now.

Why do I suppose that?

The answer is in the first line at verse 27:  
But I say to you that listen..."

Another way to translate that line is:  
"I declare to you who are **still** listening..."

Jesus' Sermon on the Plain, if not literally  
thinning out the crowd was leading people  
to close their ears to the teaching.

And we find Jesus will not keep quiet

as he delivered his most difficult commands.

The sermon reminds me of a seminary professor's advice to us as we read about Jesus in the gospels.

The professor recommended that we always keep this question in mind,  
“Why did they kill him?”

We get an answer here in chapter 6 of Luke.

Jesus' sermon words sound lovely until we have to do it.

“Love your enemies?”

It is perhaps the most difficult thing to do.

“Do good to those who hate you,” whaaat?!?!  
When I am honest, I admit that I'd be just as happy to drop my enemy off a cliff than I would be to love them let alone be good to them.

Yet, that notion of giving up the right to retaliation is the only way to keep violence from creating more violence.

We cannot ignore how very dangerous it would be



if everyone began to love their enemies.

People retain power by keeping  
populations hating each other.

Weapons manufacturers make gigantic profits  
on selling the latest military hardware to kill  
enemies from afar on video screens.

Jesus was also critiquing the patron system  
that generated wealth to the select few.

This sermon was one of the  
reasons Jesus was killed. (Pause)

The great Christian writer, Albert Schweitzer,  
held that Jesus, or the early church  
which recorded the teaching,  
never intended that we could live  
like that - loving enemies, turning cheeks,  
loaning without repayment,  
doing good to those who hate you -

He said we could not live like that for very long.

Since most believed that Jesus would return soon,  
this was only a temporary command.

Kind of like holding your breath.

You can do it for a little bit, but too long  
and you pass out.

This gave us a way out from following  
his direction and advice for how to live  
in community.

But, remember what Jesus was doing.

He was inviting people to a level plain,  
of all generations,  
to live into a new life.

He revealed a new reality that keeps us  
from boxing people into categories,

and Christ gave us a new life that leads us away  
from taking an eye for an eye.

Jesus' sermon rejects our definition of safety  
of having two guns if our enemy has one.

His teaching leads us to object when our  
government stays powerful by selling us  
the lie that if your enemy has one bomb  
then you need to get a bigger one...  
20 bigger ones!

That's how the world goes,

that's how things will stay  
the way they are.

How troubling it is to buy into the lie  
that keeps telling us that dropping bombs  
and sending drones is the only way for peace.

It just continues the cycle of violence  
creating more violence.

Jesus declared these truths to us  
who are still listening. (Pause)

I know, it is hard to keep listening to Jesus.

He makes us kick and squirm and try  
to reinterpret his words to mean something else.

Something less...

We want a nice, safe, easy religion that  
doesn't include loving enemies.

But it is messy to take on  
the ethic of imitating Jesus.

Love has a way of making life sloppy.

We will make enemies when we take

his Sermon on the Plain seriously because  
it doesn't allow us to stay silent.

It moves us into action and keeps us  
from going about in life making nice. (Pause)

There is a key verse in the midst of  
this difficult teaching, however.

And this is where I will close.

The very last one we read in the gospel today.

“Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”

When we embody God's mercy, as best  
we can because we can never do mercy as  
well as God, but when we embody  
that kind of mercy for those we call enemy...  
watch out!

Light will dawn on this weary world.

**AMEN!**