

Scripture tells us, “Those who say, ‘I love God,’ and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars.” So, I did my best to think back to consider anyone I truly hated. Now I can offer up many examples of “strong dislikes,” and that’s perfectly fine, because that gets me off the hook with this particular verse. It’s not quite to the emotional intensity level of hatred, so, obviously, God must be okay with it, then, right? At least, we can keep on telling ourselves that to make us feel better. And so, looking back, there was someone that came to mind rather quickly, but, also, while looking back, it’s rather embarrassing to think how much I should have been upset with myself, instead.

Nevertheless, she was the Director of Contextual Education at Trinity Lutheran Seminary. Jane Jenkins was responsible for a variety of things, but the most pivotal time for us students with her was the whole process of finding an internship site, where we would spend our third year of seminary training to get a better hands-on experience with the whole ministry thing. So, at that time, internship supervisors came to the seminary campus for what were called “meet-and-greets,” when, in reality, they were interviews between these supervising pastors and potential interns. I interviewed with clergy from Ohio, Michigan, New York, even Colorado for God-knows-what reason. Then, a couple days passed, and I was called in to meet with Professor

Jenkins, who informed me that the supervisors I interviewed with...let's just say they were not overly sold on the idea of working with me for an entire year. Maybe personality wouldn't be the best match, maybe the congregation makeup wasn't quite right...whatever the reason, those five interviews didn't work out so well; and so, Professor Jenkins said I should make a phone call to this pastor in Dallas, Texas, who, she said, could work with absolutely anyone.

So, of course, in the heat of the moment I took that to mean that he could even work with dreadfully awful me. In addition, I had no interest moving that far away from home, to live away from my family for that long, to go to a place where I knew absolutely zero people. When I walked out of her office into the courtyard that day, the words flying through my head were not even of the PG-13 nature, and it was all against Professor Jenkins. It was, obviously, her fault that she didn't think of other pastors closer by that I could have worked with, in the end. She, obviously, had a vendetta against me. Of course, it was because of *her* that I was nervous and didn't interview well at all. Let's just say...she wasn't my favorite person for quite awhile, forgetting the fact that when I spoke to Pastor Bill Waxenberg on the phone for an hour that it was, by far, the easiest and most comfortable conversation I had than all

the rest from earlier in the week. Regardless, for the next few months until I started in Dallas, Professor Jenkins remained...strongly-disliked, let's say.

However, soon enough I realized it turned out to be the best fit for me, and to this day, if I have any half-decent pastoral integrity, or whatever you want to call it, I owe so much of it to Pastor Bill Waxenberg. And I also realized that the dismay I unleashed on Professor Jenkins, behind her back, did no good at all for anyone. But, it's just easier that way for us humans to go on about our daily lives.

Whether we want to call it "strong dislike" or flat-out hatred, it's, evidently, just normal now. Hatred is considered a positive thing: it means we care so much about the value of our own life, the well-being of our family and friends, social issues, and on and on. If we truly care about such things, then absolutely anyone who stands in the way of the perfection for all the above we must get so angry, so resilient, to the point of hating them; that's if we want to be the strong and dedicated of the human being-sort.

And yet, God thinks otherwise. It's not just about going back to the whole "love thy neighbor as thyself" mindset that should be a foundational core for our day-to-day life. But, also, when we enter into this dark abyss of hatred, we expend so much emotional and spiritual energy that it completely

drains our soul for anything else of worth. And, in doing so, we overlook the things that *we* can work on within ourselves: the things that can also benefit the value of our own life, the well-being of others, and so many issues that affect communities near and far.

God seems to think hatred is not going to pull off anything of worth for the betterment of God's children. It only keeps us in an abyss far too deep to dig ourselves out. God seems to think the incredibly simple, but overwhelmingly beautiful, act of love between one another is the only way to lift each other up, to make God's children feel as if they are, indeed, children of God.

Even love from a complete stranger on the other end of a phone line to someone who felt so much disdain, so much loss of confidence; and through that simple conversation, love can burst through at the seams. In the end, what ultimately digs us out, what saves us from ourselves time and time again, is not *our* love, but the love that God brought to life for all us in Jesus Christ, even on our worst of days when we only feel the agony of hate. But even on the day when humanity unleashed such hate against Jesus Christ on the cross, God responded with the very love that saved us all forever. And for that, we give thanks to God indeed! Amen.