

Love your enemies (Luke 6:27-38)

Apparently, it's not up for discussion.

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"Love your enemies," says Jesus. Apparently, it's not up for discussion. It's not something to be tried once in a blue moon, if we're in the mood. It's not an abstraction; it's love in its most extreme action. With these words Jesus establishes an extraordinary standard for compassion. We may find it difficult enough to love good friends, or some family members, or ourselves. But this is the Jesus way. Mercy for the unmerciful is the path that God has chosen to transform the instinct for revenge into the power of unconditional love. We are the delivery system for God's healing power. (Try saying that when someone asks you where you go to church. "I don't go to church. I'm a delivery system for the mercy of God, 24/7, 365.")

"Love your enemies." That's what the sign said on the front lawn of the church where I had just arrived for a meeting. I parked and got ready to get out of my car and go inside. Then I stopped. *Not so fast*, said a little voice. *You're on holy ground here*. "I say to you who are listening," says Jesus, "love your enemies." *Stop*, said the voice, *and listen*.

"Love your enemies." As difficult as the commandment sounds, people put it into practice all the time. A victim of ridicule refuses to fight fire with fire. A woman imprisoned and tortured for speaking the truth to power dares to pray for her captors. A man abused as a child by his alcoholic father one day keeps a bedside vigil when that same parent is near death, thus creating a space for words of confession and forgiveness to be spoken. In each case the love of enemy appears in

a different incarnation, but it always requires the same spirit of empathy and courage. It needs a tough mind and a tender heart.

“Love your enemies.” Braver Angels is an organization dedicated to tapping our power for listening and respect, to depolarize the current toxic political environment before people become enemies to one another. According to the organization’s website, “Braver Angels is leading the nation’s largest cross-partisan, volunteer-led movement to bridge the partisan divide for the good of our democratic republic. . . . The American Hope campaign is equipping Americans across the political spectrum to work together and demand the same of politicians from both parties.” Unity for the common good is a sure sign of the Spirit’s presence. It is a way to bring people together in order to reduce the likelihood of their ever becoming sworn enemies.

“Love your enemies.” I have heard people say that this kind of loving is unnatural, counterintuitive, pointless, and impossible. But what if Jesus thinks that the human capacity for loving those who harm us is the most natural form of love? After all, aren’t we born with the image of God? Isn’t God’s way of loving woven into the deepest and most vulnerable parts of our lives? Are we ever freer than when we choose to love those who mean to harm us? Because in those moments we are showing forth a better way, a way that offers the hope of peace. We are letting love have the last word.

“Love your enemies.” OK: It’s a hard saying. But it’s also the hope of the world.