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Luke 6:27-38
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We're all in the Same Storm

Good morning Church, today we gather to discern one of the central texts of Anabaptist nonviolence. "Love your enemies" For some, this text is simple, yes love is the center of the gospel, it's what the Christian journey is all about. For others, this is hard, because loving people who persecute you is difficult. So today, we are going to do the hard thing, to take this text seriously and ask, why are people our enemies in the first place and how do we love them.

Please pray with me: if anything I speak is true and upbuilds this community, let it be remembered and pierce deep into our hearts. But if I speak any false or puts a stumbling block in front of a child of God, may it be forgotten as soon as I speak it. Amen.

When I was at seminary, a black queer fem activist stood up in the middle of the dean's "state of the school" speech. Then, others joined them. A white gay student, A female white Ally, People of color, and black students. They preached from the aisles, about how the divinity school espoused values of inclusion but did nothing when professors said racist or homophobic slurs that got in the way of a productive learning environment. Free speech is what it is, it is difficult to study the intricacies of Matthew when you are doing grief work about an authority figure saying you don't deserve to study at Duke.

After the protest, the dean said that she wanted to work to make this divinity school a place where everyone can learn and be appreciated. She wanted to be a good neighbor. But after the speech, one of the protesting students came up to me and said, she does not need to work at being a good neighbor, she needs to be a good enemy. Not because of any animosity between the students and the dean, but because of the baggage and limitations of the office of the dean that has boxed her into an enemy of these students.

I want to be clear, these students are good people. This dean is a good person. But being good or doing the right thing has nothing to do with whether we are enemies. Institutions make us enemies, Society makes us enemies, history makes us enemies.

The best way to think about this is the story of the Good Samaritan. The premise to understand this story is that good religious people think that samaritans are their enemies because of religious differences. The Samaritans are wayward people who believe in God, but worship God in the high places, rather than the temple in Jerusalem. Does a Samaritan get up in the morning and decide, I'm going to worship God the wrong way and insult my Jewish brothers and sisters?

No, the Samaritan worships God in the same way as their ancestors did, honoring God in a way that they see as fit.

But I hear some of you saying, but my enemies are not like the Samaritans, they are more like the people in today's texts, abusers that strike people or thieves that sue off people's clothes. What is the Christ-like response when people are hurting other people?

Let me tell another story. My professor of Peace Studies, Jim Liechty, told us a story about his time in Northern Ireland during the troubles when Protestants and Catholics were killing each other for political reasons I won't get into today. And here are two best friends, a protestant and a catholic who were done with the killings and just wanted to live in peace. So one day, the protestant boy is killed in a random attack. So the protestants, not knowing who killed the boy, killed a catholic in retribution. A catholic who ended up being the slain protestant boy's best friend.

Yes, people are hurting one another. Yes, there is great injustice in this world. Jesus knew this all too well when he wrote love your enemies. He knew that his Jewish brothers and sisters chafed under Roman rule, arbitrary killings, and harsh taxes. People wanted to rise up, to take up the sword to force those Romans and their Herodian puppets out. They did it 40 years after Jesus's death and all it got them was a temple reduced to rubble.

So in a way, Jesus is practical. Turn the other cheek so you don't get stabbed. Give someone your shirt so they don't sell you into slavery. But I think it's more than that.

Jesus says to treat others as you want to be treated. What a radical, yet simple statement. As I said at the beginning of this sermon, society has forced us into enemy status with one another whether we like it or not. But in Genesis God created us in God's image, white nationalist or black, homophobe or queer, God created each and every one of us. Jesus went to the cross for the love of his friends and the soldier/police who did not know what they were doing.

So the only way that I am able to live with this scripture to love my enemies is to realize that we are all in that same storm together, we are all born of God, and deformed by the cultural, economic, and religious forces bearing down on us. God sends or withholds rain to the righteous and the wicked alike. If the crops fail and people are hungry, do I test people on their politics or religion? Or do I lend to them without expecting to get anything back?

I don't have all the answers about how to be a good enemy. This is difficult for me because I speak to you from the blood-soaked pulpit of Christianity with all of its baggage and limitations that I cannot cure. One answer is self-emptying, where we give up power and privilege so that the voices of the dispossessed and the outcasts can rise up. This would be

following Jesus, who emptied himself, taking the form of a slave. Or perhaps we follow the words of Desmond Tutu, that the oppressor and oppressed both need to be liberated. Moving beyond judgment, to do grief work with one another as the world changes under our feet.

I don't know because I am filled with anger and bitterness. These people don't deserve my love, much less my money. But God is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. God calls me to be merciful, just as God is merciful.