

“Giving Up Enemies”- Luke 19:37-44 – Rev. Jeff Childs

During this Lenten Season we have talked about giving up control, expectations and superiority so far. As we journey on to the cross and the empty tomb, we will be challenged to give up popularity, our own lives and even death itself! For some of us today's lesson might be one of the hardest. For others this will be a reminder of what we have learned along the way as followers of Jesus - the Prince of Peace. Reflect with me on this scripture from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount: *But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,* (Matthew 5.44) Loving our enemies can sometimes feel like as idealistic a notion as world peace, but Jesus showed us that caring even for those who persecute you is a real mandate that we can carry out by following his example. Even as he was being nailed to the cross, he showed compassion. *Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they're doing."* (Luke 23.34) And I believe in answering the question about "who is my neighbor?" that Jesus commanded us to love; he told a parable in which a Samaritan (a hated enemy to some) is the shining example of a loving neighbor. (Luke 10.29-37)

How might we follow Jesus' teaching that we are to love our enemies? Listen to a little more of what he has to say: *But I say to you who are willing to hear: Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you.* (Luke 6.27) Who are your enemies? How might you love them in the name of Jesus? We can pray for our enemies rather than praying against them. The prayers of some of the shouting crowd may have been for Jesus to overthrow the Romans. Their hatred of their enemy may have been as strong as the words of Psalm 137 against the Babylonians during the exile there. Read again the last line of that psalm to hear their hatred and pain! *A blessing on the one who seizes your children and smashes them against the rock!*

Peace isn't just a far-off fantasy. Jesus wept over Jerusalem because the people following him misunderstood his message about peace. The people are hailing Jesus as a king. Kings commanded armies and went to battle. The story of David and Bathsheba actually begins with these telling words: *In the spring, when kings go off to war...* (2 Samuel 11.1a) It seems odd to share this retelling of the story of Jesus entering Jerusalem on what we call Palm Sunday, two weeks before we celebrate that Sunday. But here in the gospel of Luke we get an insight from Jesus that he grieves for the people not at peace but at war in their hearts. They cannot receive his gracious visit because they want a fighter not a lover. It says that he wept because he brought *"things that lead to peace."* But they seem to want things that lead to war and overthrowing the oppressors.

We call Jesus the Prince of Peace, but do we really believe and live like peace is possible in our world today? It might not be possible in the whole world today, but is it possible in your world today? It is! If you will give up your enemies! I believe it is possible if and only if we will forgive our enemies and turn from seeing them as enemies but rather as friends. The old phrase is "Keep your friends close, but your enemies even closer." The implication perhaps is to be so close that you know what your enemies are plotting and planning by keeping a close eye on them. But what if we took the words of Jesus seriously? Might we truly draw our enemies closer as we pray for them - not against them, as we love them - not hate them, as we forgive them - not condemn them?

There were two types of peace known by the early church in Latin terms. Pax is the word for Peace, and you may have heard Pax Christi – the Peace of Christ. But there was also the term Pax Roma - the Peace of Rome, which was enforced by the Roman Army who defeated all enemies and thus achieved "peace" all paid for including the huge standing army with the spoils of war. This may have been the basis for the third temptation in the wilderness that we talked about when

Lent and this sermon series began. There was a temptation of all kingdoms coming under Jesus' control and world peace to reign if Jesus would worship the devil – perhaps the devil of power! But Jesus came and offered his Peace not through war and domination, but through sacrifice, love and forgiveness. Many churches today practice passing the “Pax Christi” or Peace of Christ. But it seems for many it is only done at church as they do not seem to take it with them out into the world. How might we go and share it with others this week?

There were Zealots in Jesus' day that wanted to fight the Romans and throw them out of Jerusalem and Judea. Some must have thought Jesus with his popularity could rally the people and the troops to do just that. (We will talk more about that on Palm Sunday.) But here, know that Jesus came to earth to do more than that. He did not come to defeat the enemies, but to defeat that which is in us that would call a neighbor, we are to love, an enemy! In that regard I am reminded of the line from Pogo in a comic strip and an Earth Day poster by Walt Kelly in 1970 “We have met the enemy and he is us.” I find the old saying is often true, “I am my own worst enemy.” Perhaps the enemy Jesus was calling people to love and forgive was ourselves. And this morning perhaps he is saying just that to you and me. In the name of Christ, Peace be with you. Alleluia and Amen.

Have you had enemies?

Do you have some still? Write down their names. Be sure to add yourself if you are one.

Pray for each individual or group of people. As you do, erase them from your list. Give up your enemies.

What might you do to show love and forgiveness to each one of your former enemies? (Jesus did not say this would be easy!)

Peace be with you. Pass it on.

Forgive Your Enemies

Jeffrey B. Childs 3/21/25

“Forgive your enemies,”
Is what Jesus said,
In the time of Roman armies,
People lived in fear and dread.

As we then contemplate,
On all the evil done,
Of all the enemies we hate,
We are our own worst one.

Forgive yourself today,
All other enemies too,
The prince of peace shows us the way,
Ask, “What Would Jesus Do?”