

“The Hard Truth About Love”

Rev. Barb Edema, Bridge Pastor

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Genesis 45:3-11, 15; Luke 6:27-38

Ghana story...

Perhaps the hardest thing about this passage is it hits different ears in different ways. For some people, “Love your enemies...” makes perfect sense – easy. If we want to follow Jesus, then we love everyone and stand up against hate with lots and lots of love. For some people, the “enemy” is all too real and forgiveness is the most ridiculous expectation. For others, forgiveness of an enemy is a long and arduous process, but it is done and peace is somehow restored.

Told to love our enemies and do good to those who hate us and take two strikes on the cheek instead of one (and, excuse me, why even one?) might go against our sense of what’s fair and what’s not.

After doing a lot of reading on this passage this past week, I found nothing in what I read to adequately respond to these commands. No help at all.

So, I looked at the word “enemy” in the Greek. The word is “**Echthros**” It means “hostile” or “hated.”

Some of my issues with this passage is how it has been misused by the church. Women have been told to remain in abusive marriages based on these verses. Same for others who were in vulnerable situations.

There isn’t a mandate to strike back, and there is not a mandate to stay put.

Victims of crime and abuse have been told they must forgive their enemies.

People with little have been told by **corrupt church leaders, like Jimmy Swaggart, et al, to sell their homes and possessions and give all their money to him and his ministry.**

These verses are not easily explained away. If someone tries to make it simple, run.

Hostility and hatred can be existential, such as “The Nazi’s” or “Isis” or “All Muslims,” just to name some obvious choices. They are called ENEMIES. I don’t know if any of us has ever had an encounter with a member of one of these groups. Don’t get me wrong, they are enemies of many people and countries. But I don’t get a pain in my stomach if I’m told to forgive them as my enemies.

But I have a friend. I told this story at WGod this past Monday night. My friend had picked up her 12-year-old son from school. **Joe’s story...**

How soon was my friend supposed to forgive the girl on the cell phone for killing Joe? Before the funeral? A week after he was buried?

When our hostile hater steps into our lives and damages our souls or our bodies or the people we love, how do we say, “I forgive you.”

(In the Old Testament, Joseph had been his father’s favorite...)

What Jesus **didn’t** say:

1. **Remain in a hostile place where you are hated and abused.**
2. **Live in poverty because you have given away everything you own to people who kept taking.**
3. **Forgive immediately and get on with your life.**

I do believe Jesus was turning the world upside down with this little chat. The Jewish people lived under such strict laws and retributions, they also were surrounded by real haters and enemies, including the Romans. But even their neighbors, the Samaritans, were enemies. There were also crooked tax payers committing extortion and the Jewish people could do nothing about it.

Eye for an eye was the way. It was the law of Torah to get retribution. Surprisingly, “an eye for an eye” was a way to control vengeance. If a person poked out your eye, you could take his eye, but not both eyes. You could not break his legs or burn down his house. You could take one eye.

Jesus explains for those who listen, that there is a new law in town. One law. A law of Love. A freedom to let go of hate, revenge, retribution.

Which seems really great. We are allowed to go through life in forgiveness, mercy and generosity, never expecting money or possessions to be returned. Let it go!

If we have been harmed by a hostile hater, forgiveness will lighten our souls.

Perhaps you read or heard this week about **Hoda Muthana**. She is a young woman who left the State of Alabama at the age of 20 to go to the Middle East and join ISIS. She was married to three men, who are all dead, and she has a two-year-old son. She is now 24 and is begging to come home. She has seen the error of her ways and is fearful for her life and the life of her son. She is ready to face punishment for what she did at the age of 20.

She's been told by our government that she cannot return.

What is the right thing to do? Where do we draw the line of forgiveness, mercy, and generosity? Who is unable to ever be loved? Who is outside the bounds of redemption? What would Jesus do?

Forgiveness is hard when your enemy and hater is not existential.

There are no easy answers, and anyone who says so, perhaps has not been on the receiving end of a true enemy; a hostile hater.

But if we have ever been forgiven for hurting another person in thought, word, or deed, we know the overwhelming power that Jesus is talking about.

End of Ghana story...

I believe we must start in a place where we love God. If we're connected to God, after whatever amount of time it takes, our pains and hurts and deep scars find balm. Even in the midst of darkness a light flickers. It grows.

But we know we have forgiven another when we open our lunch bag and give “the enemy” all that is in it. Amen.