

Another Angle, Another Blessing

Such challenging texts today! We all know that in the New Testament Jesus gave us the Great Commandment: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.

I mean this is already a big challenge for us. There are so many things in our lives that could keep us away from God. Our work, school, money, our busy schedules, and many other things or people could lead us away from God. To love our neighbor, it is not that difficult to love our neighbor but to love them as ourselves that's another story. I couldn't imagine myself to love someone just like how I love myself even with my mom. I still love my mom, but many times I would think for myself first before I could help her. **As a sinner who was born with sins, the nature of my self-interest and the self-center makes it impossible for me to love my neighbor as myself.**

Now, Jesus gives us another challenge, **to love our enemies!** I really don't like that, and I think none of us would want to love someone who we hate. If I have a choice, today's texts would be one of the scriptures that I want to avoid to talk about because it doesn't make sense to me! I believe it is also a tough text for all of us.

I remember when I was in high school, we had a world history class and in that class, there was one session talked about world religions. To help us memorize the main idea of each religion, my teacher would use one sentence to summarize every religion, and the sentence was used for Christianity is from today's texts. Can you guess which sentence she used? Whenever she said, "Love your enemies, and anyone strikes you on one cheek, offer the other also." all my classmates would laugh, and I felt very uncomfortable because this sentence became a label for Christianity. There are so many sentences why you chose this one. I talked with the teacher, and I learned that it was not her random

selection; it is the sentence was used the most in exams. I was very surprised, and I'm not sure if it is still being used in the exam, but next time when you talk with someone in my age, who comes from China, they may know today's texts. But generally speaking, this is not a good start if you want to talk about the gospel for people who don't know God.

When Jesus said, "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you." How come? This is impossible for me. How can I love someone who hurts me? When the harm is so deep, I couldn't even forgive, how can I love them? And the word "enemy" is kind of far away from me, and I couldn't think about someone who I would call as an "enemy."

But when we look back to that historical time, the Israelis were truly living under their enemies, the Romans. They hated the Romans because the Romans destroyed their home, killed them, cursed them, and abused them. The pains and hatreds were seared into their bones. So, when Jesus told the people to love these enemies, such words turned many away from Christ.

Let's think about the word **enemy** together. It is hard for us to find someone we see as "enemy." What does the enemy mean today in our lives? Who are our enemies (ask people to take a few seconds to think about this question)? Maybe the word enemy is too strong for us. How about people we don't like? Or couldn't stand with? I think the enemies we are talking about today are not what it looks like back to Jesus time, but the enemies could appear in our lives in different ways.

It could be someone didn't reply our message, or someone cut in front of us while we are in a hurry to somewhere, or we experienced a bad customer service, or other things and people that make us angry or offended us, or someone we just simply don't like, and we don't want to work with them, talk with them, listen to them, or even be with them in the same space. But it could also be someone in our lives who did abuse us and hurts us so deep that we hate them. Imagine for

those families who lost their loved ones' in a mass shooting; it is just impossible for them to love the killer. **We all have our enemies at different levels.**

Then the question is how do we love our enemies? I think today's scripture gives us a different angle to answer this question. In our first reading from Genesis, Joseph and his brothers reunited after 20 years, his brothers were so scared that Joseph would revenge for what they did to him. However, Joseph's reply touched my heart. He said, "God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors." Joseph was the victim, but now he was comforting his brothers, who sold him into Egypt.

Joseph could treat his brothers as his enemies since he was in the position that he could even kill them, but he saw his experience of being sold by his brothers in Egypt in an entirely different angle, and he **turned the whole story from hatred to a blessing**. This blessing flowed from one family to the nation of Israel. Joseph was not a super man who didn't have any emotions. He was crying and lamenting, and I believe there must be hatred in the beginning, and probably struggles, angry, forgiveness and many other emotions mixed. But Joseph chose to love and see the whole thing in a different angle.

This is the gospel speaks to me today: **even if we couldn't see the whole picture and we couldn't love, at least we could try to see things in different angles/views**. When we try to look at things in different perspectives, it might change the whole story. We all have very different stories, different ideas, and different views in our lives. Even for the same restaurant, we could have very different experiences for the food and service.

Sometimes others may hurt us maybe because he/she just lost their job. We might also hurt others because we had a bad day. There are so many things that could blind us to see the whole picture, the complete story.

This week, we lift up the Family Moving Forward team, thank you all for taking your time and efforts to be with those families. I was the Tuesday overnight host; we all know the big snow on Wednesday and school canceled. So, the three families ended up staying at our church for the whole day on Wednesday. In the

early Wednesday morning, there were many text messages, calls, and communications going back and forward; we were all trying to figure out what's going on and what's the plan for today. In the end, Pastor Jen came in with Alisa, and she volunteered to take care of the kids, our lovely friends Maria and Jesus cooked delicious lunch for all of us, and Amanda and her parents brought kids to play in the snow. What a blessing day! **It stated with stresses, tension, unhappy, and anxiety, but turned out as a blessing.**

Let's think about these two questions when we go back home:

Who are the enemies in our lives?

What can we do to see things in different angles?

Amen!