

Son of God, God of Bread, Bread for fools
1 Corinthians 3.10-11, 16-23; Matthew 5.38-48

“I say to you,” says Jesus, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...so that you may be children of your Father in heaven.”

Jesus is still on the mountain, teaching his disciples. “You’ve heard it said,” he repeats, then quotes Scripture, and follows each time with something like, “but I say.” Some would accuse him of re-writing Scripture. (This is, of course, an accusation we’re all too familiar with.) But he isn’t changing what God said in Scripture; he isn’t just making up new things because he thinks God was wrong. Rather, he’s revealing God’s Word...a Word that is always being revealed. “This is what you understood God to say...but I say to you....”

“I say to you, love your enemies.” This isn’t a new teaching for most of us. We’ve heard and know that God wants us to love our enemies. But I realized something recently: I haven’t really heard *this* teaching. What I’ve been hearing is, “You should not have enemies.” So I’ve spent most of my life denying that I have enemies. Because that would be wrong. But Jesus doesn’t say, “Love your enemies...so that they will become your friends.” He says, “Love your enemies...so that you may be children of your heavenly Father.”

“Love your enemies.” This teaching is for those who *have* enemies! “Love your enemies.” We love our enemies not in order to stop them from being our enemies, but in order to live into our identity as children of God! (I’m pretty sure I’ve never heard that teaching before!) Jesus explains by saying that our heavenly Parent “makes the sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.... Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Parent is perfect.”

In order to love my enemies, I have to identify my enemies. And it turns out, I *do* have enemies! And it's actually quite freeing to identify my enemies. In order to love our enemies, we have to know who our enemies are.

“Love your enemies...so that you may be children of your heavenly Father.... Love your enemies...and be perfect as your Parent in heaven is perfect.”

Now, this demand that we be perfect has been the source of much difficulty for many of us. What I've heard is, “Be morally perfect. Don't ever do anything wrong. Never sin.” But that isn't what Jesus is saying. The word *perfect* means *mature*. Or *complete*. “Be complete as your heavenly Parent is complete.”

So how is God complete? God's sun shines everywhere, on everyone. God's rain falls everywhere, on everyone. God isn't selective. God doesn't discriminate. *All* bodies, *everywhere* are recipients of God's sun and rain, of God's life-giving nourishment, of God's mercy and grace. That's how God is complete. No one is outside of God's reach, no life is outside of God's light and life. *All* bodies, *everywhere* are loved by God.

In the same way, we are to be complete. As children of God, created in the image of God, Jesus is teaching us to love in the same way that God loves—without discrimination, *all* bodies, *everywhere*. Completely. “Be complete in your love, as God is complete...so that you may be children of your Parent in heaven.”

So what does loving our enemies look like? It's easy enough to say “love your enemies,” but when we encounter our enemies, what are we to do? Just before this teaching, Jesus described some of the ways to engage our enemies. The enemies Jesus identifies are those who are abusive, oppressive, violent. In response to each of his enemies, Jesus provides a strategic non-violent direct action. In each scenario Jesus offers a way of re-directing actions that are meant to violate and oppress, transforming them into powerful and subversive

actions of resistance. The strategies are brilliant. The actions transform predictable victim/offender encounters into encounters between equals. The person being struck or made to walk a mile, refuses to become a victim. AND, takes an action that invites the potential aggressor to see the other as an equal. Offering to walk the second mile isn't offering to take on another mile of being dominated, but rather, in that context, the limit that a soldier could demand was one mile. So if I offer to walk the second mile, I'm claiming my agency knowing that on the second mile, we're walking as equals.

The non-violent direct actions that Jesus offers here are amazingly strategic. In other encounters in the gospels we see similar brilliance, like the woman brought to him to be stoned. He re-directs the aggression of her accusers and their intentions to do harm. And he does so in a way that turns their eyes from the woman to looking at themselves. And they discover they are no different from the one they are accusing, the one they want to kill. In Jesus' encounters with his enemies, he consistently loves them, and with his responses to them invites them to live into their potential of becoming children of God. He is complete as his Father in heaven in complete.

When Katerina and Jonathan talked about their time at Standing Rock, they too described strategic non-violent direct actions. They described water protectors, grounded in prayer, loving their enemies, taking non-violent actions to re-direct the violence that was acted on them.

Jesus is a master of non-violent direct action. His encounter with the apostle Paul is a beautiful example. It was a non-violent direct action that led to Paul's conversion. Before he was writing letters to the Romans or Corinthians, Paul was Saul. And he wasn't loving his enemies. Instead, he was killing them. And when the time was right, the Risen Christ engaged his enemy, "Why are you persecuting me?" The encounter with Jesus was so

profound, so completely loving that Paul started becoming the son of God he was created to be.

And now Paul is teaching. He's teaching the Corinthians how to love completely as their Father in heaven loves. He's teaching them non-violent direct action. But in order to love completely, in order to re-direct actions that are intended to harm, we must have Jesus, the crucified and resurrected Christ, as the foundation of our lives, the foundation of our bodies and beings. It wasn't an ideology or a theology that interrupted Saul on his way to Damascus, rather it was an embodied encounter. Paul's body and being, his flesh and blood, were stopped, blinded, undone when he was met by the resurrected Christ. Paul is teaching us that Jesus as our foundation isn't something spiritual or metaphorical; it's physical, material, body and bones.

Jesus said "love your enemies." Paul's message is the same, but he's using the vocabulary of buildings, of temples. The resurrected Jesus, loving his enemies, loved Paul. That love transformed Paul, it transformed his foundation; it transformed his body and being. The temple was no longer a disembodied edifice to go to, the temple was now personal, bodied...home. If our bodies are God's dwelling, then God, the One who loves perfectly, completely, is also dwelling in and at home in our enemies.

With the crucified and resurrected Christ as our foundation, Paul teaches that we are God's temple in the world. God doesn't live in heaven, or in a particular building, but God's Spirit lives within us (the "you" is collective). That's an incredibly high view of human beings! God inhabits us! Especially when you think about the Holy of Holies, the sacred place where only priests could enter, and they could enter only once a year, and only after they were ritually prepared. And here Paul says, "You are God's temple"!

But there's something else about temples and our bodied communities that Paul is opening up for us. Temples are also places where sacrifices are offered. Different cultures of course have different gods and different gods require different kinds of offering. And we know from the Hebrew Bible that it was believed that God required some of those offerings to be sacrifices. Sacrifices are violent. They require blood, which means they require violence, death.

With Paul's teaching that we are God's temple, he stirs our imagination for how to understand Jesus' last supper. When Jesus took the bread and gave it to the disciples, telling them it's his body and to eat it, he was giving them a non-violent direct action to practice. At the Passover, a lamb was to be killed as a sacrifice to God. But Jesus interrupts the sacrifice, showing them what it means when God says, "I don't want your sacrifices."

What we now call communion is a non-violent direct action. An action that refuses violence, a strategic act that refuses victimizing.

These teachings are hard. As an Anabaptist, I'm not too concerned about doing physical violence to anyone. I'm not likely to kill anyone as an offering to any of my idolatrous gods. But in the political reality that we are living in, with my words and with my disdain, I am all too ready and eager to offer my enemies to the gods, sacrificing their rightful claim as children of God to satisfy my anger, my vengeance, my fear, my disdain. I am all too eager to get on my moral high ground, hurling words that are hateful, words that seek to obliterate my enemies.

Love your enemies.... You are God's temple... This is the foolishness of the Gospel. This is the kind of nourishment we get when the resurrected Jesus is our foundation. This is the bread that the Son of God, the God of Bread feeds us. And it is for the sustenance of our very real lives, our bodied lives.

We need this bread. Our world needs this bread. Killing our enemies will not transform the world. Violence doesn't change lives...love does. Strategic love. Complete love.

“Love your enemies...so that you may be children of your heavenly Father.”

As we gather at Jesus' Table this morning, let us come...and bring our enemies with us...not to sacrifice them...but to love them. Let us eat this bread for fools as an act of resistance, a practice of persistence. Let us eat this bread and drink from the cup, refusing to hate. This will take practice...and strategy...and the imagination of fools! I cannot imagine a more exciting time or a more exciting way to live with you in our world right now! May we *be* a Fellowship of Hope...a fellowship of fools...practicing the foolishness of hope...of loving our enemies!