

“I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.”

Love your enemies...

I could be wrong, but I believe that for many of us...It's a call that none of us really want to think about, much less try to implement in our lives. It's a difficult ask; it's confusing, and it's something I've prayed about throughout the week.

What does it really mean to love our enemies? Before we get to that question though, I wonder, who do we mean...who do we think of...when we think of our enemy? If we are good, faithful, kind-hearted Christians, who truly love their neighbors, is it possible for us to have enemies?

I say, yes! You see, the biblical and scriptural meaning of the word enemy, has implications that goes beyond each of us individually. In biblical terms, our “enemies” include anything that opposes the will of God, including Satan, sin, people, and institutions that work against the will of God.

So, then, why would Jesus suggest that we should LOVE our enemies? Again, it's a question I've wrestled with all week, and as usual, God didn't disappoint.

Yesterday morning, I had the pleasure of listening to the words of The Rev. Dr. Canon Kelly Brown Douglas, an Episcopal Priest who is the Canon Theological at the National Cathedral. If you're not familiar with her and her work, you're missing out, and you might want to google her.

She opened with a few questions, pertinent to our moment in history, including: How have we come to normalize cruelty? How has the staggering lack of empathy become acceptable to us? She listed examples of brown children handcuffed in ICE raids, and millions of people in our own country who are likely to go hungry because of unreleased SNAP funding, before citing the Psalmist, “How long, O Lord, how long?”

How long will we be caught in this moment of despair that allows oppressive systems to flourish while paralyzing the rest of us in the process? And, better yet, will our response to despair cause us to lose sight of who we are in this moment?

As I listened to her words, I found myself inspired, encouraged, in a new way to consider this question found in our Gospel. How do we LOVE our ENEMIES who thwart the will of God?

Make no mistake my friends, anyone who inflicts, participates in, or condones suffering of another human being (particularly for their own advantage) is working against the will of God.

Our God of the Old and New Testaments has always been the God of the oppressed, the poor, the sick, the outcast, the enslaved, and the immigrant neighbor. Our God has always been the God

who led the suffering to a better life — a life of equity, justice, and freedom. Any entity, institution, or being that works against that future vision of God where new life is born out of the darkness of despair or where innocent people are harmed to benefit someone else, is our enemy.

Yet, God says, we should LOVE our enemy. So let's unpack LOVE just a little. I fear that when we hear the word "love" we are sometimes confused, especially in this moment when love, Christian love, is being redefined. Divine love is vastly different from our human definition of love. Divine love carries the elements of justice, mercy, reconciliation contained within it. Divine love does not sanction the notions of "going along to get along," or "tough love that allows power to insist on obedience and conforming to the mandate of the day," or "silence that turns a blind eye rather than standing in the face of injustice."

Divine love requires speaking truth in love. Divine love requires the making of justice in the midst of injustice. Divine love is active and works towards the hope of the future that God promises for ALL of us.

Divine love and hope manifest themselves in joy. And, joy sometimes becomes an act of sacred defiance: where we can turn our cheek to the offender, and still stand strong, faithful to who we are, demanding that justice for all is the moral standard we live by.

Divine love inspires us to remain hopeful and joyful, even in the midst of despair, actually, perhaps even in defiance of despair. Because, at the end of the day, we all know that it is God who will save us. We know that if we can endure, and treat others the way that we wish to be treated, if we can make justice in the face of injustice, if we can speak truth to lies, and if we can continue as the church to remain true to who we are...then we are part of the solution. We are doing our part to sustain the will of God's future, God's love, God's vision in a world that often tries to stamp it down.

Loving our enemies with divine love is not a new phenomenon, is it? This is part of what we celebrate today on this feast of All Saints and All Souls. This is what we remember in the lives of all of the saints, martyrs, and everyday believers who bring God to life in the here and now. This is what we hope to do in our lives to. To become harbingers of the truth, sanctuaries that protect the sanctity of God's future lived out in the lives of common and imperfect people. This is the hope, the joy, the salvation that comes from God, through us, and out into the hurting world.

This is the divine love, hope, and joy that manifests in us even as our enemy hates us, curses us, or abuses us...

And, in that, we stand strong, true to who we are as people of God who walk forward together into the vision of God's future. Where divine love, hope, justice, mercy, and reconciliation are available to everyone. When we are able to do these things in our own everyday lives, then God's future becomes just a little more tangible, even when it may seem like despair has taken hold.

My friends, go forth on this feast day, inspired, encouraged, and joyfully rooted in the divine love that empowers us and stand tall, face to face with any enemy who tries to beat us down.

Amen.