

Centre Congregational Church, United Church of Christ
Seventh Sunday after Epiphany

24 February 2019

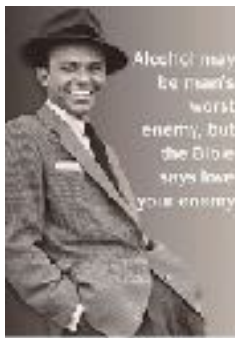
“Being as God Wills Us to Be”

Hebrew Scripture: Genesis 45:3-11

Christian Scripture: Luke 6:27-38



This morning's scripture reading is so 'out there' that most people, including Christians hardly take it seriously. Jesus' biblical injunction to love your enemies is so difficult to accept that it is often interpreted irreverently.



For example, the famous singer Frank Sinatra once quipped that “Alcohol may be man’s worst enemy, but the Bible says love your enemy.”

In response to the outrageousness of the command to love our enemies, many of us think nothing of doing the exact opposite. How many of you have ever prayed something like this:

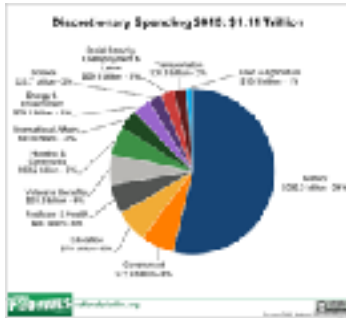


One of our most famous presidents, John F. Kennedy, once issued advice that seemed to obey and simultaneously contradict Jesus’ infamous advice saying:



It’s actually quite ironic that many consider the United States of America to be a ‘Christian nation,’ especially by our more conservative and fundamentalist brothers and sisters in Christ. The money that you and I spend to kill our enemies is breath-taking. For all of those who complain about taxes, very few seem concerned about how much

money we spend to be prepared to and actual kill our enemies. In 2015, 54 percent of our country's discretionary spending is designated to not loving our enemies.



We spend more on military than any other country by far.



Now, by my mentioning that, I am not necessarily advocating a reduction in military spending nor do I necessarily advocate that we should never kill our enemies. Those debates are for perhaps others sermons. What I am merely doing is pointing out a contradiction between our faith and our actions. How do we maintain and fight in the military while following Jesus?



“He was great at loving his enemies...but not so great at picking the appropriate times or knowing how far to take it.”

This morning I would like for all of us to struggle, not necessarily with loving our enemies, but rather with the fact that we don't actually believe many, if not most, of Jesus' teachings. That is our starting place.

Friends, I would like to propose to you a very difficult truth. Very few of us believe that which Jesus taught. Let us just say it. Let us just admit it. We do not believe much of what Jesus preached.



How many of us actually believe ‘blessed are the poor?’



How many of us actually believe 'blessed are the meek?'



How many of us believe 'blessed are those who mourn?'



How many of us believe, 'Love your enemies?' How many of us actually do good to those that hate us? We automatically have real concerns with those commands. To do good to those who hate us may lead us to be continually be abused. Surely God does not desire our continued wounding. Who after being assaulted can love the one who assaults them? Ludicrous. Who in this sanctuary believes that after

having your home robbed the police should release the perpetrators and not return that which was stolen? And worse, who believes that after being robbed, we should offer more to be stolen? Jesus' advocacy to bless those that curse us and to offer our other cheek to someone who struck us is difficult to accept. So, what do we do? Do we politely ignore what Jesus said? Do we explain away what Jesus said, so that it means nothing? Do we just ignore what Jesus says and then do the opposite - both in our personal lives and in our national policies? If we explain away or ignore or do the opposite of what Jesus says, what do we do with the claim that Jesus either is or speaks the mind and heart of God? If we dismiss Jesus' teachings, do we dismiss Jesus as the presence of God on Earth, and if we dismiss Jesus as that, are we not ultimately declaring that we are not in fact Christians? Or, if we are Christians, we are not Christians that know and follow Jesus. Then, with what are we left?

Friends in Christ, there is not enough time in my sermon to discern whether we should love our enemy or not. This morning the only thing we have time for is to do that which I have to do - and that is to confess to God and to one another that most of us do agree with the mind and heart of God. And why is that? We do not have the mind and heart of God. Therefore, we don't understand and we can't accept the mind and heart of God.

That being said, I want to confess to you that I desperately want to know the mind and the heart of God. I am not there yet, but I desperately want to be there. I want to be where I am not. That is our starting place. We are not where God is - but we desperately want to be.

Friends, we are going nowhere as long as we dismiss, ignore or contradict Jesus Christ's teachings. We are going nowhere in our faith if we do not admit to God and one another that we are not even close to where we want and need to be.

Perhaps being a Christian, is not being a Christian. Perhaps being a Christian is *wanting* to be a Christian.

Friends, Jesus advocates that we love our enemies.



I believe Jesus did just that! I cannot yet. And neither do I think many of you can. Yet, what we may have in common is a desperate yearning to want someday, to know and feel the mind and heart of God, and thus 'love our enemy.'

This was the Word of God, and it was preached to the people of God, the people of God responded, “Amen!”