

## **love does not keep a record of wrongs**

Matthew 5:43-48

January 29, 2017

*When Jesus saw the people, he went up the hill and sat down. They gathered around him there and he spoke to them.*

*Love your enemies and hate your friends. That's what you have been told. But I tell you: love your enemies and pray for those who make your life miserable. Then you will show that you truly are children of your heavenly Father.*

*Because that's what God does. God makes the sun shine for everybody, good and bad alike. God sends rain for the benefit of all people, those who love him and serve him and those who do not.*

*It's easy to love somebody who loves you back. It's easy to treat your friends with kindness and generosity. But you must be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.*

What do you think? Don't be thrown by that word "perfect." It would be easy to think: "Perfect? I will never be perfect," and give up before you even start. The word translated "perfect" means "complete." It means finished, complete, whole, not part, all the way, not part way. If you love only your friends, your love is not complete, you've only gone part way. God's love is perfect because it is complete, because God loves not just some, but all.

*You've been told, love your friends and hate your enemies, but I tell you love your enemies and pray for those who make your life miserable.*

What do you think? Are you ready to do that? Are you ready to go all the way? Why should you? Why should you listen to Jesus? And what difference would it make if you did?

And what about the risks? What could you lose? How might you suffer? What price might you have to pay for trying to love your enemies? Who would blame you if you can't? Who would blame you if you won't?

Love your enemy. Did you notice? I didn't say "enemies," I said "enemy," because love is always specific, because love is always about "you," about a particular "you." Love is not about being nice in general, not about being pleasant and agreeable, not about being loving. Love is not about attitudes, but about actions, not about demeanor, but about doing right ... by you.

Love your enemy: not disagreeable people in general, but your your enemy. Your enemy. You say you don't have any enemies? Yes, you do, some by your choice and some by theirs.

Think about your enemy. Think about him. Think about her. This is what we say at the Simple Evening Liturgy services each Wednesday during Lent: "We bring to God someone whom we find hard to forgive or trust." That's your enemy: the person you find hard to forgive or hard to trust.

So think about your enemy. Think about loving your enemy, about doing right by your enemy. Think about being patient and kind with him. Think about not being jealous or conceited or proud. Think about not being ill-mannered or selfish or irritable with her. Think about not keeping a record of wrongs.

Because? Because you are a child of God. Because you are a child of God and should act like it! You should do what your Father does. You should show the family resemblance. You should be like God.

God gives sun and rain to good and bad alike. God creates an environment where all are given the opportunity to thrive. God doesn't choose who will be bad and who will be good -- each one of us makes that choice for ourselves -- but God gives each of us a chance. God does right by us by giving each one of us a chance, by providing the resources and the motivation and the guidance and the freedom to live well, to be good.

When you love your enemies, you do the same. You cannot make them good -- what they will do and what they will be is their own choice -- but you can give them a chance. You can create an environment where growth and change and goodness can happen. You can, as far as you are able, make the relationship open-ended and workable and redeemable. By not keeping a record of wrongs.

Love does not keep a record of wrongs, because keeping score, holding on to hurts and grudges, freezes the relationship at one moment in time, at a bad moment in time. It traps both you and your enemy, not letting either of you move on to a better place. But love wants what is best, for both of you, so love gives both of you a chance, a chance to change. Who loved you? Who gave you a chance?

*Love your enemies and pray for those who make your life miserable.*

When you do, who benefits?

They do. Your enemies benefit. They are blessed with unexpected and undeserved love, just as you have been blessed with unexpected and undeserved love! Your love gives them the opportunity to see the world and themselves in a different light, by love's pure light, and love's light makes everything look better, even people who may look pretty bad to everybody, including themselves.

And you do. You benefit, because hatred and resentment and long lists of wrongs carefully recorded and filed away for self-protection are a heavy load to carry. You may still have enemies -- Jesus did -- but you don't have to add any fuel to the fires of hatred which might well end up consuming both them and you.

But there's more! Your love, especially your love for your enemy, has a much broader impact. It's not just about you and him, not just between you and her. It's about all of us, and about God.

Because God benefits. When you love your enemy, God benefits. God benefits because amazing grace in its human form makes God's amazing grace all the more imaginable and all the more believable. Human love which is ready to forgive wrongs, and which is ready to pray and to keep on praying for seemingly irredeemable scoundrels, well, it's astonishing, isn't it? And glorious! And it brings glory to God, its source.

We do enough, sadly, we who call ourselves Christians, to sully God's good name and diminish God's reputation, but won't the world stand in awe of a God whose children love their enemies? Who even try?

God benefits and the world benefits, because this is how peace is made, one unconditional love at a time. When we love our enemies, we change the rules, for ourselves, yes, but for everybody else, too, or at least they can see that the rules can be changed. Loving your enemies gives them a chance. Loving your enemies gives peace a chance.

It is God who will bring peace to the earth -- and, oh, how I long for it! -- but we are God's hands. We are the tangible expression of God's heart. We reflect in ourselves, if we will, the light of God's love, love's pure light.