

Feb 20 2022. Seventh Sunday after Epiphany.

Pr. Steve

Love Your Enemies

In the name of God, Abba Imma, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Rumi wrote this.

**A certain preacher always prays long and hard
and with enthusiasm for thieves and muggers that
attack people on the street.
“Let your mercy, O Lord, cover their insolence.”
He doesn’t pray for the good,
but only for the blatantly cruel.**

**Why is this? asks his congregation.
“Because they have done me such generous favors.
Every time I turn back toward the things they want.
I run into them, they beat me up, and leave me nearly dead
in the road, and I understand, again and again, that what they want
is not what I want. They keep me on the spiritual path.
That’s why I honor them, and pray for them.”**

**Those that make you return to God, for whatever reason,
be grateful to them.
Worry about the others, who give you
delicious comforts that keep you from prayer.**

**Friends are enemies sometimes,
and enemies friends.**

Aren't you glad you came to church today? Love your enemies.... three words. He said them. The whole world knows he said them, and because he said them, we need to pay attention.

God has no enemies, only family. The endless divisions that we create, religious, ethnic, national are irrelevant in God's eyes and heart. The divine image in each of us and all of us is what establishes our humanity. That is what we build our lives and our community upon. The most radical act for a Christian is to act like a Christian. We are members of the body of Christ. When we see enemy, we risk becoming what we hate. Our humanity, our humanity depends upon our recognizing others as human.

Eighty years ago yesterday, the directive was issued, **9066**, that Japanese people are no longer human beings. *‘Put them in the camps.’*

The anti-Semitic flyers posted on the Iron Horse Trail and in neighborhoods [recently] want to persuade us that our Jewish friends are not human beings.

Dehumanizing others always dehumanizes us. Love always unites, never divides. Love is always merciful. Love is freeing. Love wants to break those chains that lock us down in the past, keep us bound to past sufferings and divisions. Love wants to set us free--and we're not sure: 'I've got to keep a couple enemies, don't I? Just to be on the safe side...'

It is not enough to be good. See, that's what legalists, moralists, authoritarians, and Pharisees want: 'We just want to be good'. And that's not good enough, according to Jesus, who says *'You've got to do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who negate you.'*

Shall we? Shall we? Is it optional? What motivates us?

I don't know how this works. I can't explain it, and like all of you, I'm deeply disturbed by the spewing of vitriolic lies, and hatred, and division, which is just overwhelming us these days.

But I also carry with me a comment from a friend who survived the days of apartheid. Even though imprisoned and tortured, he said, *"Our captors are God's children, and they are treating us like vicious animals. We need to help them return to their humanity.."*

Forgiveness is always about a fresh start, a new beginning. We can begin anew. The beauty and power of that story of Joseph and his brothers--separated for how many years?--and he found the capacity to forgive them. And not until he and they were weeping in each other's arms, could they say a thing.

New life, what we call resurrected life--it doesn't look like what's gone before. Did you get that in Paul? It's a seed being planted. We're not going on endlessly repeating this,?? with the fears and traumas that all tear us down. A new life is trying to emerge through us. And when that openness of heart comes, breathed by the spirit, freeing the heart, our humanity emerges.

And not to forgive is not an option, because it's not neutral. You see, when we don't forgive, eventually that leads to bitterness, and hatred, and corrosion, and corruption of our own spirits. So, *"Love as I have loved you,"* says Jesus. 'Love,

just keep loving till the end, because no one will be excluded, not even our enemies, nor the wicked, not even the ungrateful.'

This is the gospel. Thanks be to God.
Amen.

The peace, which surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.
Amen.