

Hinde Street Methodist Church

Sunday 24th February 2019

11am Richard Shepley

"Love your enemies? Whatever next!"

Luke 6.27-38

'But 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. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you.

Really there is not much to say here. It's all straight forward– like a PowerPoint Presentation.

Here are 4 pointers for a Christ-like Life

All of you

- Love your enemies
- Do good to those who hate you
- Bless those who curse you
- Pray for those who abuse you

And here are 4 examples that you can extrapolate from.

- If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also
- From anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt
- Give to everyone who begs from you
- If anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again

There you are. It's all quite simple. In the words of Nike "Just do it!"

I might as well sit down.

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

That's all very well, but does this apply to me. I mean who are my enemies – I don't think I have any.

And Love? What does that mean in this situation?

Who are our enemies?

Well in Jesus' time obviously it was the Romans as the occupying force. It must have been easy to understand **them** as your enemy. They could tell you to carry something for them and you couldn't say no. They could – if they chose – take the shirt off your back and you couldn't do anything about it. They could beat you, clap you in irons and even put you to death for no real reason.

But **was** it that straightforward?

But there was of course another side, as seen in Monty Python's "The Life of Brian", set at the time of Jesus - where the leader of the People's Front of Judea (John Cleese) trying to stir his followers up to action, asks his fellow revolutionaries, "What have the Romans ever given to us?" and gets the answer, "The aqueducts". "Well apart from the aqueducts, what have the Romans ever given to us?" Other suggestions are made, so Cleese ends with, "Well apart from sanitation, education, medicine, wine, public order, irrigation, roads, fresh water systems, and public health, what have the Romans ever given to us?"

No, it wasn't straightforward any more than it is now. The forces that moulded their society that were never wholly bad – or good.

Also, in Jesus time, there were thieves, muggers, brutes, bullies. Violent powerful people who terrorised others. There were important people who were corrupted by their power.

In fact, the situations that Jesus' hearers' faced were not that different from the ones we have to face nowadays.

The forces that mould our society that are never wholly bad – or good. Thankfully we live here in the UK in a safer world than Palestine in Jesus' day. But that isn't true of places like Syria, Yemen or – if you are young and black – some parts of London.

And now we have Brexit

Methodist Recorder Pointers for Preachers

"Jesus' teaching about loving our enemies has a particular significance for a society which is divided and polarised more than at any time in living memory. It is hard to find compromise when faced with such a binary choice between such different opinions.

We may balk at the word "enemies", but those with whom we disagree can too easily seem like that. Within the church, we must strive that those who have contradictory convictions never see each other as 'enemies'."

And we have social media where anonymous tweeters suggest that some female MPs should be raped because they support a second referendum.

Haters and enemies seem to be as plentiful today as they were in Jesus time. Those are the ones Jesus says we have to love.

Hmmm. Is there any wiggle-room here?

“For instance, what does the word Love mean? You don’t expect me to LIKE these people!

I’m sorry, but I can’t see anything likeable about Shamima Begum. She can stew in her own juice as far as I’m concerned. And I just cannot feel any affection for ISIS, the English Defence League, Jeremy Corbin, the new provisional IRA or whatever they call themselves, Boris Johnston, Donald Trump, Michael Gove, Anna Soubry, Claudia Winkleman.”

Claudia Winkleman?

“Oh, it’s her fringe hanging down into her eyes – it really irritates me.

“I cannot find anything appealing or attractive in any of them. Are you expecting me to LIKE these people?”

Well, no Jesus isn’t saying that. It’s not that kind of love.

Sorry, but it’s that dreaded Greek word “agape” again.

Agape embraces a universal, unconditional love that persists regardless of the attractiveness of the one who is the object of the love. It never stops - even if it is not returned, but is rejected and ignored.

Thus, it is nothing to do with feelings, it is concerned with actions.

If we have come to know and follow Jesus, we are sure of who we are and can be at peace, knowing where we fit in the Divine Loving Order. We can turn from looking at ourselves to focus on the other. The one who is hating or harming.

Because we will still have enemies, but they are no longer defined as those **we** hate. We do not hate. We are told to love our enemies - our enemies being those people who are hostile to us – who want to harm us, take revenge on us, even destroy us.

As an act of will we love them. Loving them we will want to understand them. We will start thinking, “Why are they acting like this? What is driving them to such behaviour?” In doing so we begin to love our enemy.

But there is more. Jesus says not only are we to love our enemies, he then goes on to say,

“Do good to those who hate you”.

Doing good to those who hate you goes beyond non-retaliation. Jesus is saying we are to take **positive steps that promote their welfare.**

RICHARD NIELL DONOVAN writes,

We are not to wait to see what the other person will do before we decide what we will do. Instead, we are to seize the initiative by loving, doing good, blessing and praying. These behaviours might seem weak in the face of hatred and violence, but they are not, for in transforming us, Jesus has transformed them.

So back to the beginning of this sermon. ***Just do it.***

Like Gordon Wilson

On 8 November 1987 a bomb planted by the Provisional IRA exploded during Enniskillen's Remembrance Day parade, injuring Wilson and fatally injuring his daughter Marie, a nurse.

"I bear no ill will. I bear no grudge. Dirty sort of talk is not going to bring her back to life. She was a great wee lassie. She loved her profession. She was a pet. She's dead. She's in heaven and we shall meet again. I will pray for these men tonight and every night."

Later, as a peace campaigner, Wilson held many meetings with members of Sinn Féin. He also met once with representatives of the Provisional IRA. Wilson sought to understand the reasons for the Remembrance Day bombing in Enniskillen. He also held talks with loyalist paramilitaries in an attempt to persuade them to abandon violence. In doing so he received threats from other Loyalists.

On Remembrance Day ten years later, the Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams formally apologised for the bombing.

Now isn't that amazing. *I bear no ill will. I will pray for these men tonight and every night."* And he went on to meet the IRA **to understand the reasons that they did what they did.**

I couldn't do that! Isn't there any help available? Well yes. Our second reading

Ephesians 3: 16-18 (English Standard Version)

I bow my knees before the Father . . . that he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you may comprehend what is the length and breadth and height and depth of the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge and that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Amen