

Sermon: Love Your Enemies?  
Preached at the Presbyterian Church in Geneva  
On February 23, 2014  
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**Matthew 5:38-48** *"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'* <sup>39</sup>*But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also;* <sup>40</sup>*and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well;* <sup>41</sup>*and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile.* <sup>42</sup>*Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.* <sup>43</sup>*"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'* <sup>44</sup>*But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,* <sup>45</sup>*so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

The plot of Stone Soup can be found in many Folk Tales of a variety of cultures. According to Wikipedia: In the Portuguese tradition, the traveler is a monk and it takes place in Almeirim which claims to be the capital of stone soup. In the French and Hungarian versions of the tale, the travelers are soldiers returning home from the Napoleonic Wars.



In Scandinavian countries like my Swedish heritage, the folk story is "Nail Soup". *That one scares me when I think of swallowing a nail.* In these versions, the main character is typically a tramp looking for food and lodgings. The tramp convinces an old woman that he will make nail soup for the both of them if she would just add a few ingredients for the garnish. However, even scarier is the Eastern Europe variation of the story called *axe soup*. *Think of the size of pot you would need.*

*(Paraphrased from Wikipedia)*

What is interesting to me is the tie- in to our Old and New Testaments. The Sermon on the mount and our Gospel lesson today has the difficult commandment for us to "Love our enemies". The Old Testament has several places where the philosophy is revenge, Eye for an Eye tooth for a Tooth". However, Jesus urges us to turn the other cheek, go the extra mile, and give up our coat for someone we may not like.

In defense of the Old Testament, there are passages, which agree with Jesus' teaching. In Proverbs, the wisdom is "Do not rejoice in an enemy's defeat" and if your enemy is hungry give him bread to eat and water to drink and God will reward you.\* Whether you are reading the Hebrew or Greek Scriptures, the point is the same, "love your enemies".

So, how difficult has that been for you? Can you remember a time when you turned the other cheek, metaphorically? And, you were slapped again? I do. When I was teen leader at a Presbyterian Camp, the suburban and inner city youth groups for a weekend. I was from the suburbs and probably looked like it. All the girls bunked on the second floor of the lodge. Honestly, I am not sure what provoked this next action, but these "mean" girls from the city emptied my suitcase out the window. Everyone saw me out there picking up my clothes while

my “enemies” were laughing. I kept thinking, “turn the other cheek”, that is what the Bible tells us.

Thankfully, a few of the inner city leaders approached me They decided to have a private meeting with the “mean girls” and hold them accountable and asked them to get along with the suburban kids who they considered the “enemy”. All of a sudden, going the extra mile with your enemy made sense. I, who was ready to go home, found strength and courage to go the extra mile and stay the rest of the weekend. Relationships were tense at first, apologies were made and we all spent time getting know each other. Few became long life friends, but there was measured cooperation and respect.

Did you know the meaning of the term enemy, which is "inimicus" in Latin? Which means “bad friend”? It changes your perspective, doesn't it? If you were once friends, it means you trusted that person or group of people. If the trust was broken and you were hurt, the normal reaction is to pull away for protection or retaliate. Fight or Flight is our primal response.

It actually takes time for emotions to calm down and cooler heads to prevail. To reach out to someone who has crossed you is to become vulnerable. Vulnerability is not rewarded in this society. Grabbing power is the way of the successful. But, not in our faith tradition. Not in the radical teaching of love. Christ calls us to be perfect which sounds like an impossible moral obligation. It might help if we translate this closer to the Greek meaning of "teleos", which means “mature”, “whole”. The goal is be more like Christ or to be mature in Christ. The following translation from The Message gives us an easier version to understand.

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*You're familiar with the old written law, 'Love your friend,' and its unwritten companion, 'Hate your enemy.' I'm challenging that. I'm telling you to love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst. When someone gives you a hard time, respond with the energies of prayer, for then you are working out of your true selves, your God-created selves. This is what God does. He gives his best—the sun to warm and the rain to nourish—to everyone, regardless: the good and bad, the nice and nasty. If all you do is love the lovable, do you expect a bonus? Anybody can do that. If you simply say hello to those who greet you, do you expect a medal? Any run-of-the-mill sinner does that. In a word, what I'm saying is, Grow up. You're kingdom subjects. (You are citizens of the God's Realm, my comment) Now live like it. Live out your God-created identity. Live generously and graciously toward others, the way God lives toward you.”*  
*(The Message, Matthew 5:38-48)*

Yesterday, at Freda Umiker's (she was 100 years old) memorial service, several family members said admired and wished to emulate her. We are all uniquely called to be mature in Christ. To be a citizen of God's Realm is to be generous and live graciously, showing hospitality to friend and strangers.

Moreover, when people throw stones at you, place it into a soup pot. Add ingredients of kindness, forgiveness, mercy, grace and generosity. It is a tall order: A high standard that is true. However, I believe this is why we need each other as friends in faith. We are called into community so that we might rely on each other. Let those who are mature in faith console, counsel and direct you following Christ, the corner stone.

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