



Feb. 24, 2019-What To Do With Enemies?
Given by Rev. Mattei
[Luke 6:17-38](#)

Jesus stands on “*a level place*” (or “a plain”) and from there he delivers a long sermon. Matthew sets a similar sermon on *a mount* to emphasize that Jesus, the new Moses, received those teachings from God (Matthew 5-7). The geographical setting has a different function in the Gospel of Luke. The word “level” often refers to places of corpses, disgrace, idolatry, suffering, misery, hunger, annihilation, and mourning (see [Jeremiah 9:22-24](#); [Daniel 3](#); [Joel 1](#); [Habakkuk 3](#); [Zechariah 12](#)). Jesus’ sermon is directed to such a level place. That’s where the glory of God (salvation) would be revealed (see also Isaiah 40:4, 18; Ezekiel 3:22-23; 8:4). While standing in a broken level world Jesus teaches the ways of the Realm of God. God inspires renewal via a new way of approaching reality, totally opposite to the ways of the world. The Church is called to follow Jesus and become the leaven (Luke 13:20-22), the salt and light (Matthew 5:13-14), or the new wine (Luke 5:37-38) for society: a new way of seeing, of thinking, of operating.

Who is an enemy (a person who is actively opposed or hostile to someone)? One with opposite political views? Of different religious tradition? Of another culture? An annoying neighbor? Someone whose life choices we can’t condone? The argumentative in-law? A racist? A human trafficker? A terrorist? The one who smiles at you in your face and seeks ways to harm you from behind? A corrupt politician? The one who is upset with you because his unspoken expectation has not been met? And the list can go on and on.

Jesus tells us to love, pray for and bless our enemies. How challenging it is to hear Jesus’ terms for discipleship and then change our ways. Why, we are used to our ways; we grew up in the way the world and even now it’s the ways of the world we breath,

move and exist in: in many ways we are in the world and of the world; we are the offspring of the world as opposed to being the offspring of God (see [Acts 17:28](#)). In a self-preserving way, it would be foolish of us to do as Jesus recommends: to love our enemies and do good to them, to lend and not to expect anything in return. How radical and yet how foolish! Life is hard enough, why would anyone expose oneself to such abuse?

On the other hand, if we were to love only our friends and those we like, would there be a need for us to even be called Christians? But how can we follow in Jesus' footsteps willingly knowing that the ways of the Kingdom are demanding and the result of following him *will* (more than *may*) lead us to the cross? I don't like conflict. I get anxious, stressed out and depressed when I experience tension in my relationships. My tendency is to be accommodating and avoid conflict. My desire is to be able to work out conflicts by making good use of listening skills, but way too often I realize I freeze up when conflict manifests itself. I realize that is one of the emotional responses to conflict: fight, flight or freeze. But Jesus invites us to consider a fourth possibility, namely to be as merciful as the Father ([Luke 6:36](#)). Mercy, one of God's primary qualities (see [Exodus 34:6-7](#)), is renouncing to the gut-felt pressing desire to seek revenge ([Deut 32:35](#); [Rom 12:17-19](#)) and releasing people from what we think they deserve. If we follow the non-violent ways of Jesus, the effects of the kingdom may be already evident in our personal transformation (Phil 2) and in our interpersonal interactions. The other becomes not my enemy but a human being, a child of God whose actions, words, choices I may not enjoy right now but is still one who has the potential to grow to the full maturity of Christ and manifest the glory of God. Jesus understood this in his life and revealed it even in his last breath: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they are doing." (Luke 23:34) He was aware that people are blind to the internal darkness and the powers that enslave them into meanness and lock them into egocentric lives. The good news is the freedom that his light and his ways are able to give.

But how do we manifest the values and non-violent practices of the Realm of God in the midst of the level places of life where we find misery and challenges of all sorts? What

is the Christian response to an offense? First of all, the initial shock of the confrontation needs to be overcome skillfully: we can use breathing and a non-judgmental mind ([Luke 6:37](#)). Breathing relaxes our primitive reptilian brain which instructs us to play dead, strike back or leave the scene. It buys us time and we are able to relax muscles (in our chest, jaw, neck, and shoulders) and to facilitate the oxygen flow back into the brain and the rest of the body. Once relaxed, we are less prone to react and more able to choose our response. We are thus empowered to give the most appropriate attention to the unpleasant issue. How we show up tells much about ourselves and our values. This is when we have a chance to be merciful, show right judgment and apply the compassion our Teacher used with us. However, his message to offer the other cheek may be misunderstood: all Jesus is saying is to resist evil with goodness and not to perpetuate the cycle of violence. In [Luke 6:29](#) (but even clearer in [Matthew 5:39](#)), in line with many other passages in the Bible (see [Psalm 37](#), [Proverbs 24](#), [Rom 12:21](#), [1 Thess 5:15](#), [1 Peter 3:9](#) for instance) the emphasis is on resisting the temptation to get even. In fact, Jesus wants us to be shrewd as snakes and innocent as doves (Matthew 10:16)

Secondly, loving our enemy may mean resist any violent thought we may have, renouncing any hatred and resentment, refusing to entertain any judgment and sense of superiority, rejecting any desire to seek revenge and do harm, dismissing anything at all that dehumanizes the other. Remember, Jesus is speaking today's words well aware that some people can't stand him and clearly are looking for ways to get rid of him. His calm, his restraint and especially his gentleness in the face of opposition is extremely laudable. He is in the hot seat and yet he wants his disciples to follow his example in doing good, blessing, praying for and even loving our enemies. How remarkable! His total commitment is not only to the Father's kingdom and its values; his most radical commitment is to people, whether friends or enemy, so that all may experience life abundantly. He did get upset with people but only because they wouldn't see, couldn't see and refused to see how the evil they were doing was causing harm to others and to them as well. They could not realize (and therefore could not confess) that they were in the dark even as they were convinced that they could see. To trust the Light a leap of faith is required. Much faith is required of us when we hear Jesus say, "love your enemy." Do we trust? Are we ready to let go?

Thirdly, let us manifest the inner light of Jesus by blessing others with peace. Let us commit to the ongoing process of spiritual growth and transformation, endeavor to build bridges and seek reconciliation. Let us educate ourselves in the ways that promote peace and let us offer the peace of God that passes all understanding and transforms human hearts (see [Phil 4:7](#)).

Now may the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, make you complete in everything good so that you may do his will, working among us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen. (Hebrews 13:20-21)