

## LOVE YOUR ENEMIES – PART 1

Nic Denny-Dimitriou - 22nd February 2004

Genesis 45: 3-11 & 15, 1 Corinthians 15: 35-38 & 42-50, Luke 6: 27-38

[Began with general comments on traditions of **the Season of Lent**, including elements of the parish programme, which may help people make good use of this Season. (Elaboration of material in the parish magazine, Update, Feb 2004 edition.)]

**We NEED a season like Lent, after today's Gospel reading.**

If anyone is feeling smug / self-satisfied / even self-righteous - the difficulty of living up to Jesus' calling is highlighted in this reading, a few days before Lent begins – as if all the more to highlight our need of God's grace to live as God intended.

Family analogy: Despite differences in personality, looks etc., we have a 'family character' and 'family traditions', ways of doing things. Often speak of the church as the Family of God – apply same thinking: We have the 'stamp of the family character' on us, and need to live accordingly.

Important reminder: We serve and respond to a God who is holy, who also is loving, and draws into friendship. A very positive focus even with the introspective nature of Lent.

**Next week:** We will repeat this Gospel passage, and consider some of our many possible responses, from willing agreement and acceptance to downright scepticism at "religious nonsense" or the seeming impossibility of living up to Jesus' demands.

Will use a quotation that I find helpful – and will also print it in the bulletin:

**I am not what I ought to be.  
I am not what I want to be.  
I am not what I hope to be.  
But still, I am not what I used to be.  
And by the grace of God, I am what I am.**  
(John Newton – 1725 – 1807)

**Summary notes:**

Focus on the Gospel reading. Continuing from last week (Beatitudes), we are confronted with the significant contrast between the values & actions of sinful humans, and the values of the Kingdom of God.

The values that Jesus taught are hard to live by. To be a true disciple (follower in the way of Christ, follower in the footsteps of Christ), is not easy. Those who claim Christianity is a cop-out or an easy thing, haven't reckoned with the different values of the Kingdom of God! The Christian Gospel is not easy! Love your enemies, turn the other cheek – even in the church, people often think that's taking things too far.

Seems to go against human nature – revenge is in our systems, and holding onto bitterness and grudges – even if they eat away and destroy us from within, as they ultimately do.

Even the injunction to pray for one's enemies is hard. (Examples experienced of that – include people praying in churches in late 80's and early 90's, for conscientious objectors / boys in the army / political activists / etc – showed up the divides in our societies.)

**Look at today's Old Testament reading:**

Joseph: a good example of one who had every reason to seek vengeance, yet was the picture of reconciliation and forgiveness.

Made possible because of his awareness of God's role in the events of his life, even the disastrous ones; a foretaste of the NT promise that God makes all things work together for good....

To believe that, one has to believe that God is God and that despite every indication to the contrary, God is able to ensure that the purposes God intended are not thwarted by demonic evil or human sin.

**Ties up with today's NT lesson:**

Continuing from last week's reading, in today's instance, about the confidence we can have in the resurrection of Christ. That takes us to the heart of our faith – the power of God as displayed in the resurrection, triumph over sin, evil and death. Not just for Jesus, but power made available to us all.

People through the ages in the most diverse circumstances have found that; we sometimes quote the more dramatic stories, but this happens in seemingly smaller (but no less important) ways every day.

**Conclusion:**

Next week: In more detail; consider possible responses to this Gospel passage.

Love is not effortless – it implies effort, and (like God) seeking the good of the other.

Desires that others experience the goodness and blessings of God's love.

We erroneously believe we have deserved it over others, forgetting that God has no favourites and that God's blessings are totally un-deserved and un-earned, and that (amazingly) God wants to bless our enemies as much as he wants to bless us!

In the end, it is part of the "family character" that we, as children of our Heavenly Father, are called upon to express.