

## LOVE YOUR ENEMIES – PART II

Nic Denny-Dimitriou - 29th February 2004

Deuteronomy 26: 1-11, Luke 4: 1-13, Luke 6: 27-38

Today is a continuation from last Sunday.

The OT reading – important one, indicating the people’s injunction to honour God who has saved them, who has liberated them from bondage (a theme in Lent – our bondage to sinfulness, human frailty) and to acknowledge this in tithes and offerings to the Lord – symbolic of understanding that everything comes from the Lord in the first place!

There is today’s Gospel reading, very appropriate for Lent, indicating also where the church’s tradition of “40-days of penitence and preparation for Easter” originates – Jesus’ period in the desert at the start of his public ministry.

There is also a repeat of last week’s reading, which (like so many) had too much in it to consider properly. Also used time last week to highlight a few aspects of Lent, in our observance of it and ways that various services, reading materials, group meetings etc. may enrich this time for us.

Began last week by saying: if anyone is smug, self-content in their spiritual life, lacking in humility, or considering that Lent is for the birds – this reading about loving one’s enemies probably brings things back to reality: That there is much which God asks and requires of us, and with which we struggle to comply.

One of the intentions of Lent is that we are again made aware of this – aware of our need of the grace of God to accomplish what God requires of us, damaged as we are in our humanity as a result of sin. In all of this, we ought never to forget the loving God who has given us so much, and to whom we choose to respond in love and obedience, as frail as that itself also may be.

What are we being asked to do?

- To forgive enemies
- To pray for them
- To give – without thinking of return
- To love even those who do wrong to us

Possible Reactions:

- Impossible demand; failure anyway, so why bother?
- Ridiculous – not for the real world / the real person!
- But I have no enemies...
- For ‘religious nuts’ – the whole world has gone soft!

Beginning with the last...

- For ‘religious nuts’ – the whole world has gone soft!
- Requirement of God, built into the fabric of the universe
- Not about being soft
- Toughness of our faith – not a cop-out
- Requires true courage and big-heartedness
- But I have no enemies...
- Jesus’ context: Roman empire; soldier’s commands; the hated occupiers
- Defined enemies – easy
- Less well-defined – let’s identify
- People we hate?
- People we hold grudges against, don’t easily pray for etc.
- Someone who has hurt me...
- Ex-spouse (many in that situation), desertion,
- Fraud – unpaid bills / corruption / company downfall
- Political situation (ex-SA, current-Zimbabwe, many other situations)
- Economic or political situation responsible for our hardships
- People who have shamed us
- Ridiculous – not for the real world / the real person!
- Called on to love / to forgive / to pray for
- Each one of us is forgiven by God, who models this behaviour for us – “I will not hold your sins against you, but will forgive them”; even when in a state of sin, God still loves us, longs for friendship with us, does not completely cut us off!
- Very much for the real world – tough, unambiguous, demanding; that’s the real world;
- It takes courage and strength!
- Failure to do these things – illness, churns us up, shrivel our heart and soul;
- Modern medical and psychological research; the need for forgiveness / letting go of grudges
- Elie Wiesel and Viktor Frankl re Holocaust / TRC experience / Amy Biehl’s parents /
- Corrie ten Boom’s situation (story of forgiveness after atrocious years spent in concentration camps – book “The Hiding Place” made into a movie c.20 years ago)
- Yet her own example years later of struggling even to shake the hand of a camp leader who attended one of her church talks in Germany, and who she recognised...)
- Impossible demand; “I will fail anyway, so why should I bother?”
- Requirement of God
- We will fail, but let that not stop us
- “fall down – get up, fall down – get up, fall down – get up” – a description of the Christian life;

#### Qualifications:

We struggle emotionally (in the gut), in case if we forgive and ‘let go’, we somehow may ‘baptise what is wrong as right’. That is not the intention in forgiveness – it does not make a wrong right, nor necessarily absolve someone from being correctly punished. (Elaborate)

Do we always make peace? No

Are we always reconciled? No

Examples: Hitler / murderer / abuser in a family situation

We may need to remove ourselves from a situation or person

However:

Holding onto grudges – damages us, not only in body and mind, but in our souls  
Need to let go – may be a process (own experience – someone who did great harm to me many years ago – I took many years to let go of it; often resurged, so had to deal with again and again)

God blesses us in the process

Natural blessings: none or less of the damage that results to us

Blessings to the persons concerned – may never be aware of consequences

Spiritual blessings: Freedom even of perpetrator, perhaps?

And avoids the shrivelling of our souls

Humility – all deserve and need God's love – even me!

Faithfulness to God

OT: “Eye for an eye” – to limit retribution!

But it has been said that “An eye for an eye... renders the world blind”!

Concluding remarks:

Not covered every issue, of course (no, won't repeat next week either)  
Books / conversations / seek out help from clergy or other

Common issues to all

No person or person's story 'singled out' – similar issues in every congregation, visiting every clergypersons office - similar issues in any medium-to-large-sized group of people!

Deal with them

Lent – time to listen to ourselves and to God more closely

Ask God to deal graciously with others,

...and for us to have the grace to deal lovingly with others,

...as he deals graciously with us

Pray for those who have hurt us

Ask God for strength, if it seems too hard for us

Seek out help / support

Some personalities – easier to love and forgive than others; may depend on childhood experiences or adult traumas; but also depends on extent to which we are prepared to take God seriously

**Come to communion rail** (symbolically as if to the holy ground beneath the Cross on which Jesus died)

All things dealt with there; all sins left there, for God to handle  
Arms symbolically outstretched to give away that which is ungodly & to receive  
God's grace

End with last verses of passage... Luke 6: 36-38 (reminder of God's blessings)