

Love Your Enemies

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Luke 6: 27-38: But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. ³¹ Do to others as you would have them do to you. "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³ If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴ If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. ³⁵ But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return.^[e] Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. ³⁶ Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. "Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; ³⁸ give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back."

My wife, Mary Page is a huge musical theatre fan. Now I knew this when we started dating. So on our second date, I decided to casually mention that I love musical theatre. Now today that would be a true statement as Mary Page has introduced me to so many musicals and plays that I do in fact love. But at the time, I had only seen Rent and Les Mis. But why let that deter me when I'm trying to impress the most amazing woman?

So Mary Page excitedly jumps into a conversation where she described the characteristics of the great American book musicals, then goes on to describe in great detail all the shows that were up for Tony's that year (I didn't know what the Tony's were at the time). And then ends her part of the conversation with a question, "So what are some of your favorite musicals..." which means I now have to name actual musicals and so I said, "Ummmm.... Les Mis." Now don't get me wrong, Les Mis is an incredible musical but that's probably about the most cliché answer you could come up with if you don't actually know much about musical theatre.

So one of the musicals that Mary Page has since introduced me to is "Into the Woods" -- how many of you have seen it? It's a conglomeration of a number of different fairy tales -- Jack and the Beanstalk, Red Riding Hood, Rapunzel, Cinderella, and a few others. There are also the "bad characters -- the giant, the wicked witch, and so on. Act 1 is very much like a normal fairy tale. Everything works out in the end for the good people and the bad people get what they "deserve." That's one comforting thing about fairy tales right -- it's obvious who the good person is and who the bad person is.

In Red Robin Hood, who is the good person? And who is bad?

In Jack and the Bean Stalk, who is the good person? Who is the bad person?

In Snow White, who is the good person and who is the bad person? (Snow White, evil queen).

And usually, in fairy tales, things work out like they should. And that's what happens in Act 1 of Into the Woods. The giant dies. The witch loses her power. The last song of Act 1 begins with these words:

And it came to pass, all that seemed wrong
was now right, and those who deserved to
were certain to live a long and happy life.

And the song ends with these words: Into the woods and out of the woods and happily ever after.

The curtain drops. All is right with the world. The bad people are either killed or robbed of their power. And the good people live happily ever after....or so we thought.

Now, besides loving musical theatre, the other thing you should know about my wife is she's the theologian of the family...literally. She's getting her PhD in theology. And when she introduced me to "Into the Woods," she told me that it's an incredible illustration for the theme of loving one's enemy (or at least seeing the humanity of one's enemy)...the exact same thing Jesus talked about in our passage today. And the musical does that by taking everything it said in Act 1 and flipping it completely upside down in Act 2.

Act 2 takes everything we think about fairy tales (and everything we think about who is good and who is bad) and wads it up into a nice paper ball and tosses it into the fire. The good people aren't so good. The bad people aren't so bad. Life doesn't have easy answers and sometimes what is right for one person or group is wrong for another person or group. Throughout Act 2, another giant comes looking for revenge – this giant is the wife of the giant killed in Act 1. She is grieving the loss of her husband and wants someone to be held accountable. In the climatic scene there is a war between the supposed "good" fairy tale characters and the giants when we have the song: "No one is Alone." Listen to these words:

Witches can be right, giants can be good
You decide what's right, you decide what's good
Just remember
Someone is on your side
Someone else is not
While we're seeing our side
Maybe we forgot, they are not alone

No one is alone

We humans like to take sides, don't we. And we would love for God to take sides. But God consistently refuses because for God to take sides would be the same as a parent taking sides. If you've had a sibling, you've likely tried to get your parents at one point in time to side with you against them. I certainly did. My brother did this...My brother did that. And while there were certainly times when either I or my brother was more at fault for whatever fight or argument we were having, there was never a time when my mom or dad chose one of us and rejected the other. My parents were always on my side. And they were always on my brother's side too. Even when my brother and I were against each other, my parents were always on both of our sides.

That's how God is. God is on your side. And God is everybody else's side, even if it's somebody who in one way or another may be your enemy. And maybe, the challenge for us is to learn to see our enemies the way God sees them – as children of God, as people created in the Image of God, as people who love and are loved, as human beings.

I think this is exactly what Jesus is getting at in our Scripture today. We must resist the temptation to divide the world into good and bad with us and people like us being good and those we perceive as our enemies being bad. Almost always, the truth is far more nuanced. It was Solzhenitsyn who said, "The line between good and bad doesn't run between people but through them." So we must be slow to judge, slow to condemn, and always attentive to avoid self-righteousness. As much as we can, we must try to see the common humanity we share with those who may be our enemies – whether we're talking in the macro sense like a terrorist cell group or a hostile country or in a much more local sense – people who see the world as differently than us or even just those people that get on our nerves. And we must always remember that anytime we hate someone, we are hating someone that God loves, so, as much as it's in our power to do so, we must strive to love them too.

But there's one more thing I need to say. Jesus commands us to love our enemies, but that doesn't mean we have to let our enemies continue to hurt us. When my brother and I would get into a fight, my parents would pull us apart; they wouldn't let us continue to hurt each other even as they refused to take sides. So too it is with God. God does not want you to let someone continually hurt you. So often, people, particular those in an abusive relationship, think that to love and forgive their enemies mean they have to stay in that relationship. That is not what that means. Forgiveness doesn't always mean reconciliation. It is not loving to let someone continue to hurt you because to love someone means you want them to be who God created them to be and no one is created to hurt another person.

In *Into The Woods*, the fairy tale characters did end up fighting the giant. They had to stop the giant from hurting them in her rage and pain. But it's a very different thing to resist the giant while acknowledging that the giant has goodness in her than it is to fight the giant with the perception that the giant is nothing but a monster. To love our enemies does not mean that we will never resist them, it does not mean that we won't sometimes work against what they stand

for, it doesn't mean that we will surrender to them. But it does mean that however we feel that we must respond to them, we will always do so in the awareness of the common humanity we share with them. We will always do so knowing that God loves them as much as God loves us. We will always do so knowing that they too are created in the Image of God.

The end of Act 2 of *Into the Woods* also ends with the refrain "Into the woods and out of the woods and happy ever after," but it's a different kind of happiness...the kind that comes not because the good guys win and the bad guys lose but rather it's the happiness that comes only by learning to see the good in all, learning to view the world with much less certainty and much more nuance, and maybe a recognition that most of all of us are simply trying the best we can:

Into the woods to mind the Wolf,
To heed the Witch,
To honor the Giant,
To mind,
To heed,
To find,
To think,
To teach,
To join,

Into the woods,
Then out of the woods
And happy ever after!

Amen.