

*Place on my tongue your words, O God, in my heart, your kindness, and teach me to accept them and no others, even the most clever of my own devising.*

I find that one of the best things about our worship services is that we don't always expect each other to launch into a deep exegetically-driven explanation of what exactly happened in each of our readings. Instead, we consider the reading in context, consider the state of our hearts and minds, and walk away with a deeper understanding of what God wants us to do. This allows multiple interpretations of the same passage, and different perspectives.

A few weeks ago, we started to look at the image of Jesus being rejected by his hometown through the lens of speaking the unpopular truth, exemplified through the courageous and very theologically sound sermon of Bishop Mariann Edgar Budde. This week we come back to it, through a different lens - Jesus' statement that no prophet is accepted in their hometown, and what it might mean to be too local to be heard, and most importantly, what we can do about that.

I'll admit that when I declared we were going to spend multiple weeks on Luke 4, I did look ahead at the correct lectionary readings for this week, and wasn't really upset that I'd get to skip over having to put together another message about loving our enemies.

Because...

This is a time in which loving those who caused us harm is really, really tough. People in our local communities...in this congregation even, have lost their jobs from the wave of ill-planned, mean-spirited cuts sweeping through the federal workforce. People in this congregation have lost the right to have their federal identity documents match their actual identity. Heidi's sermon

on loving our enemies taught us well last fall, but I didn't really want to preach at you about it again just now. Jesus doesn't work that way, though...you can't just pick and choose...so I read the reading anyway, and what I imagined was exactly what you just heard, in David and Grace's voices. Almost as if we had a chance to listen to the inner monologue of Jesus throughout the dramatic experience of his being rejected, cast out, and almost murdered by his hometown.

Jesus' consistent rhythmic repetition in Luke 6... "If you love those... If you do good...do not judge...do not condemn" stands in almost perfect nonviolent resistance to the dramatic experience of Luke 4.

As if when the people of Nazareth started out by praising him, he's already thinking "Loving someone who already loves you doesn't make you special...everyone does it".

Or "Hey people of Nazareth, *Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you; bless those who curse you; pray for those who mistreat you*" could provide you all a road map to dealing with the disappointment of asking for a miracle and being denied...but I don't think that's where you're about to go here.

And finally, instead of fighting back (and we know he'd win), adhering to "love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return" provides all the power he needs to calmly walk through the crowd, and not get thrown off a cliff.

Now, here's the thing. Loving your enemies doesn't necessarily mean letting them control you, and letting them get their way...it just means approaching the situation from the perspective of "I wish you'd do the right thing...and I can help you do it" instead of launching a retaliatory battle. (right thing is truth of Jesus)

Put another way, you can almost imagine Jesus repeating over and over again, “I am the lesson that showed your children that we live in a world of gifts- not commodities, that gratitude and reciprocity are the doorway to true abundance, not power, money, or fear.”

He might have lived exactly that, but those are not his words. Those are the words of Brian Gibbs, an educational ranger at Effigy Mounds National Monument in Iowa, who went to work on Valentine’s Day to learn he had been fired from his dream job, notified by a form letter than didn’t even get to his email before he was locked out of it, due solely to his status as a probationary employee.

In a now-viral social media post, Gibbs details who he is, including:

I am a father, a loving husband, and dedicated civil servant.

I am an oath of office to defend and protect the constitution from all enemies foreign and domestic.

I am a work evaluation that reads “exceeds expectations.”

I am being trimmed as a consequence of the popular vote

I am a United States flag raiser and folder.

In the face of a completely impersonal and unjust act, the most negative thing Gibbs wrote was:

I am an invocation for peace

I am gone from the office

I am the resistance

But mostly I'm just tired.

I am tired from weeks of being bullied and censored by billionaires

Once more...*I am the lesson that showed your children that we live in a world of gifts- not commodities, that gratitude and reciprocity are the doorway to true abundance, not power, money, or fear.* Is that not the ethic of generosity Jesus prescribes for Christians living in a hostile world made so visible? Love your enemies not by giving them power over you, but by insisting they do better...and telling them how. Even when it hurts.

Here, we do this by standing as the community Jesus calls us to be, making sure we're a community that walks the fine line of not expecting miracles from our own, but making sure we are all still listening to God's sometimes small voice running through us.

Last Thursday, we had a warm and loving potluck supper here, followed by a powerful Taize service. After the service, discussing the importance of worshipping together, Mary Bonhag commented that simply getting together to sing and pray feels like a radical act of resistance now. It sure does.

Before the potluck, an enthusiastic team of volunteers was hard at work packing bags so that children in our greater community would still have a solid lunch during school vacation. Don't worry, you all... despite your apologies for interrupting my writing, you weren't... you were inspiring it.

Before the bag packing was underway, I had a meeting with members of our church who described coming to this neighborhood as everything there is to love about co-housing, with a little more room for independence. A supportive, loving community who looks out for each other, no matter what, wrapped around a spiritual center that has withstood the tests of time, and of political winds.

Christ returned to Nazareth to contribute. Going back a little bit before today's reading, we learn "*Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all of the surrounding country. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone. When he came to Nazareth, where he was brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read... and you know the rest.*

There is so much contribution going on in this community each week, seen and unseen, and that, friends, is the miracle. Don't lose sight of it just because it's familiar.

If we are to live as disciples, we are bound to honor the contributions within this community, but don't forget... If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Jesus challenges us to a higher standard. More importantly, we are bound to resist the urge to create enemies from within. When we are disappointed in each other, we must approach our differences as an act of love, even when it's hard. We must not be disappointed when we let each other down, and when we do, we must love the people, despite the differences. In this polarized and angry world, it's the only way forward.

We might just be entering a time where the teachings of Christ are once again as radical as they were at the beginning. If they are to be heard, and God's will is to be done, it's going to take all of us, and it's going to take all of us together. In the words of Ranger Brian, Stay present, don't avert your gaze.