

Embracing Love Across Divides

September 21-22, 2024, P. Theresa Rosario

Good evening/morning! If you are joining us for the first time, we are in week two of our new series Standup and Stand Out where we are wrestling with God's objective truth as we are called to stand against the growing relevant truth within this world. We are discovering that as we Stand for His truth, inevitably we will Stand Out. However, as we will learn this morning, that does not mean being argumentative and hostile towards those who stand oppose to our viewpoints, those who attack, slander or harm us. Responding in this kind of manner is only standing against the objective truth we are trying to stand for. Retaliation is the way of the world, Righteousness is the way of the Lord.

Christ's message highlights the importance of loving the person even when you don't love the lifestyle or viewpoint. In other words, We can place value on the person even when we don't agree on the values of the person. This morning we look at how far we are to go in love - loving your enemy.

You may be thinking this morning, well that's difficult! Yes it is, and apart from Him, we will fail over and over again. If you have your bible, turn with me to Luke 6. Verses 27-42 will be our main scripture for this morning's message,

But to you who are willing to listen, I say, love your enemies! Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who hurt you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, offer the other cheek also. If someone demands your coat, offer your shirt also. Give to anyone who asks; and when things are taken away from you, don't try to get them back. Do to others as you would like them to do to you (Luke 6 27-31 NLT).

First, may I point out Jesus is speaking to those who are willing to listen. Why? Because he knows some are not willing to listen. Our human nature wants to shut our brains off any time we listen to someone saying something we don't agree with. We are hearing them but we aren't truly

listening. You may be thinking, what's the difference between hearing and listening? I like what one source had to say,

Hearing is the involuntary process of perceiving sound, while listening is the active process of making sense of those sounds. Hearing is an automatic, physiological process that happens when sound waves travel into the ear and cause vibrations in the eardrum. Listening, however, is a voluntary, intentional process that involves focusing attention on sounds and using the brain to, here it is, UNDERSTAND and interpret the sounds (<https://study.com/academy/lesson/the-importance-of-being-a-civil-and-ethical-listener.html>)

I am so grateful, that listening is a skill that can be improved with practice. If you ever been to counseling, you might have also heard of the term active listening. This takes it a step further from just understanding to connecting with the other person. And I believe, in essence, this is what Jesus is speaking to. Our ability to connect and love the person, even when we've listened and understood their message, but disagree.

Jesus is speaking to us this morning. Are we willing to listen? If we are willing to ACTIVELY listen to him, connect to His heart, then we will be able to understand the significance of loving the world in the way He demonstrated.

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES.

DO GOOD TO THOSE WHO HATE YOU

PRAY FOR THOSE WHO HURT YOU

IF THEY SLAP YOU, LET THEM SLAP YOU ON THE OTHER SIDE TOO

We can all agree, loving this way will certainly cause one to Stand Out in this world. Let's continue to read at verse 32 (blending in):

If you love only those who love you, why should you get credit for that? Even sinners love those who love them! And if you do good only to those who do good to you, why should you get

credit? Even sinners do that much! And if you lend money only to those who can repay you, why should you get credit? Even sinners will lend to other sinners for a full return (Luke 6:32-34).

In essence, Jesus is saying SO WHAT that's what everyone else does! The Lord is clearly saying to Stand Up in HIS kingdom, in HIS righteousness requires one to love there enemies. So again, he exhorts those who are willing to listen in verse 35:

Love your enemies! Do good to them. Lend to them without expecting to be repaid. Then your reward from heaven will be very great, and you will truly be acting as children of the Most High, for he is kind to those who are unthankful and wicked. You must be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate (Luke 6:35-36 NLT).

Hallelujah! Jesus is kind to those who are unthankful and wicked! Why is that a Hallelujah? Because, at times that's me and you! Were it not for HIS compassion, we wouldn't be sitting here today. Everything Jesus did followed his compassion.

In the Bible Jesus is described as being moved with compassion in at least seven instances. Jesus is moved with compassion and heals the sick. Jesus is moved with compassion and feeds them. We can see a cause and effect going on here. His compassion caused him to act.

So how do we love our enemies or those standing on the other side of politics, or other belief systems, or just ideas of what should and should not happen within a household? First, allow your heart to be moved with compassion. Here is a deep look at compassion from the Bible project:

Watch bible project on compassion (5 Minute vide)

<https://youtu.be/qJEtyAiAQik?si=UQuWhlq3ynMlxN27>

The next thing Jesus teaches us in regards to loving our enemies, I believe is critical. We love our enemies by recognizing that we are not their JUDGE! Let's continue reading at verse 37:

Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn others, or it will all come back against you. Forgive others, and you will be forgiven. Give, and you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full—pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, running over, and poured into your lap. The amount you give will determine the amount you get back (Luke 6:37-38 NLT)

I've heard other ministers use this scripture in regards to giving. But in context, I believe, the giving Jesus is talking about is in giving mercy! If you want to receive Christ's mercy, then be extravagant in releasing his mercy! You be generous in not condemning people, be generous in forgiving people. Be generous in loving people. Then Jesus does the most interesting thing. At this point the listener is thinking woah.. this is gonna be impossible, so look what Jesus says at verse 39:

**39 Then Jesus gave the following illustration: “Can one blind person lead another? Won't they both fall into a ditch?
40 Students are not greater than their teacher. But the student who is fully trained will become like the teacher.**

We are not better than Jesus. He is the one who is teaching us. Therefore, we would do well to become like him! Ephesians 2:4 tells us God, which includes Jesus, was rich in mercy. So, too, are we to be rich in mercy. Now remember, mercy is not giving a person what they deserve. It works in conjunction with grace, giving someone something they don't deserve. So when you find yourself getting into a heated argument and they are lashing out at you, don't give them the lashing back that you think they deserve. Instead give them what they don't deserve - your patience, your love, and your understanding. Easy? Absolutely not, but as we strive to be like Jesus, and allow for him to live through us we can live his way! Turn to your neighbor and say, IN JESUS, WE CAN!

Now back to this thing called judgment and Jesus telling us not to Judge others. I believe we get confused because on the one the one hand scripture tells us we are to judge with a righteous judgment. And yes, we are to judge actions and beliefs according to what Christ has shown us in the His Word to be right. This is righteousness - living a life that is in alignment with God's moral standards. However, we are not called to be judgmental. We are not to condemn the person, but we are also not to condone sinful living. From one of the daily devotions in "Our Daily Bread," it says, "Anyone who sizes others up with a swagger of superiority is not behaving in a Christ-like way. They are a bit like the Pharisee. The core of this kind of judgmental attitude is pride. It's feeling better than others when we see their mistakes, struggles, lack of Bible knowledge, or immature spiritual life."

Yes, we should be discerning. Yes, we should express our opinions on right and wrong, truth and lies, good and evil according to the Word of God, not our opinion. In fact, the Bible tells us, "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?" (1 Corinthians 6:2). I've come to understand this as hate the sin but love the sinner.

If a person is blatantly in sin, I don't judge them. I have compassion and mercy for that person, because I, too, can fall to my inherent sin nature. Does that mean, I stay silent. NO! True agape love, wont tolerate sins hold on a loved one. And according to what we're learning this morning, I'm to love my enemies, therefore my enemy is one who is loved, or my loved one. Better yet, they are God's loved one. So I chose to speak truth IN LOVE WITH HUMILITY not arrogance. Jesus speaks of such arrogance, the I'm better than you Pharisaical spirit, at verse 41:

41 "And why worry about a speck in your friend's eye when you have a log in your own? 42 How can you think of saying, 'Friend, let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,' when you can't see past the log in your own eye? Hypocrite! First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend's eye.

Work on yourself before you become overly critical of others. You might be thinking but according to the word they are wrong in their thinking. Yes,

But have you not been wrong in your thinking? Or, are you not wrong in your thinking still on certain matters. We are all being renewed in our minds daily. We all fall short and need God's grace and mercy. So let us be generous with our grace and mercy!

If we do not approach all of our conversations with this kind of humility. In inevitably we end in arguments and division. Friends become foes, husband and wives become hostile towards each other, homes will lack honor. This is why the Apostle Paul instructs Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:23-26:

Again I say, don't get involved in foolish, ignorant arguments that only start fights. A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but must be kind to everyone, be able to teach, and be patient with difficult people (2 Timothy 2:23-24 NLT).

Notice, Paul is acknowledging there ARE difficult people. Unfortunately, I used to be a very difficult person. I am confident today that I am better than I was, but still in progress. Paul continues to say,

Gently instruct those who oppose the truth. Perhaps God will change those people's hearts, and they will learn the truth. Then they will come to their senses and escape from the devil's trap. For they have been held captive by him to do whatever he wants(2 Timothy 2:25-26 NLT).

Notice; it is gentle conversation. This is the area I'm still growing in LOL! But, in regards to the heart of Jesus, the compassion, the love, the mercy, I've got a A+ on, praise the Lord. I truly, can see from our Heavenly Father's perspective that the most important thing is helping a person "escape from the devil's trap." I can be full of compassion, because I can see that the enemy is holding that person captive or hostage! We are called to set those in captivity free! For the Spirit of the Lord is upon us and where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom! Hallelujah. What we are after is to produce righteousness in that person's life. Therefore, we must realize that fighting, and getting angry is not the way to accomplish that. James 1:19-20 tells us to,

Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. Human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires.

Paul instructs Timothy to avoid foolish disputes and instead engage in gentle correction. This approach fosters understanding and compassion, reminding us that it is essential to maintain a spirit of humility and patience when confronting opposing views. So what does gentle communication look like. Ephesians 4:29-32 teaches us,

29 Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.

Ask yourself before you speak... is what I'm about to say good and helpful? Will they encourage this person? (FEEL, FELT, FOUND)

30 And do not bring sorrow to God's Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, he has identified you as his own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption.

Ask yourself, are my words and actions pleasing to the Lord, or am I grieving the Holy Spirit right now?

31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. 32 Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.

And finally, ask yourself, are my words undergirded by bitterness, rage, anger, and cynicism? If they are, most likely the words coming out of your mouth are harsh, slanderous, and cutting which will only lead to other evil behavior. Why? Because you are now enslaved and held captive to the enemy just as the person you think you are helping.

This scripture shows the importance of using our words to build others up not tear them down. By choosing to communicate in love and empathy, we demonstrate the character of Christ to those who might vehemently disagree with us. Remember, Jesus told us they will know HIM by our love!

If they see His character in me and through me, they will hopefully come to know HIM, then they will eventually know TRUTH because Jesus is Truth.

Now, I must address all those who will not listen to what the Lord is saying this morning. You want to stand on what you believe is your righteous anger and arrogance. With all the love in my heart please take heed to this warning in proverbs,

**“Pride leads to disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom”
(Proverbs 11:2 NLT).**

May we not become a people who bring disgrace upon ourselves or the God we represent! Let us Jesus the way of the Lord embracing love across divides. Amen and Amen!

Ohana Group Discussion:

1. Can you think of a time when you found it hard to love someone with a different viewpoint? How did you handle it?
2. What do you think Jesus meant when He said, "love your enemies"? How can we apply this in our everyday lives?
3. Why do you think it's sometimes hard for us to truly listen to others, especially when we don't agree with them?
4. Have you ever felt like you were being judged? How did that make you feel? How you ever been the one judging others? How do you think you made God feel?
5. What practical steps can we take to value a person, even if we don't agree with their actions or beliefs? How do we grow in our compassion for those people and how will that make a difference?