

Matthew 5: 43 – 48

⁴³ “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. ⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? ⁴⁸ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

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“The Waters of Discipleship: Unjust Rain”

Intro: Be perfect, Jesus said. Be perfect? Well, that leaves me out. Actually it leaves a lot of us out. Those of us who still honk their horns ticked off when a car cuts us off. Or how about friends who tell little white lies? Then, of course, it also leaves out children who throw temper tantrums. Jesus says be perfect as God is perfect and it leaves a lot of us out in the cold. To make matters worse, Jesus ties perfection to the line about loving enemies. Be perfect as God in heaven is perfect. Love your enemies. Is Jesus out of touch with the reality of our world?

Move 1: We start by wanting to bargain our way out. Love our enemies? Can't we do something else instead? Tell you what: how about if I take out my checkbook and drop an extra check in the offering plate this week. Or how about if I spend a couple extra hours doing volunteer work with the homeless. Heck, even selling everything I have seems easier than loving the enemy. To be perfectly honest, I do not want to love the bigot. Nor do I have any desire to rub elbows with the KKK. I mean, doesn't Jesus know how difficult it is to even have a conversation with someone who disagrees with us? Especially in a time where the only conversation being had are through bantering on Facebook or through slogans on protest signs. It is far easier to dismiss them, or exclude them, or ignore their humanity—especially if they ignore mine. Come on, Jesus! Love the enemy? Can't we do something else instead?

Move 2: Well tough news. Jesus is dead serious. There's no way around it. The sun shines on the righteous and unrighteous. Rain falls on the just and the unjust alike. Jesus says love the enemy and he means it. So I ask you: why should we love the enemy? [*Repeat statements and dialogue with the congregation*] In Jesus' time, enemies were all around. From a hill you could see over into historic enemy territory. Let's not forget they were a people under Roman oppression as well. So while a good Jewish citizen would patriotically proclaim, “God Bless

Israel,” Jesus is saying, “God blesses Rome, too.” Or while we say, “God Bless America,” Jesus is saying, “God Bless Afghanistan, God Bless Iraq, God even blesses ISIS,” too. It is a radically absurd statement to our ears. But Jesus says “love them” with a straight face. God’s rain falls on the just and the unjust alike.

Move 3: So no wonder they crucified him. Enemies in the real world belong on crosses. And we all know Jesus made his fair share of enemies along the way. Calling the religious establishment hypocrites. Talking about bringing down their holy temple. Standing up for the little person in an empire of cruelty. The religious and government elites bonded over a common enemy and nailed him to his death sentence. It’s an age old maneuver: find a common enemy and watch him unite the masses. Not much different than rallying troops to carpet bomb Iraq after 9/11 or the anti-Muslim movement today. We even hear talk about making friends with Russia to destroy terror: the enemy of my enemy is my friend. Then there are those close-to-home issues: uniting over issues—all bound by a common cause. We know Jesus made enemies. No one was excluded from his truth telling tongue. According to our world’s terms, enemies need to be brought to justice. So no wonder they crucified him. Such radical love does not belong in this world.

Move 4: Except, Jesus called upon a group of people to be his disciples. There’s you, me, others who see the cross as God signing an executive order for us to share God’s extraordinary love with everyone. Even those who curse us. Even those who’ve hurt us. Even those who work hard to take away our rights. See, we are called as ordinary people, to ordinary places in our ordinary time. But what is different about Jesus’ disciples is we share a love which is extraordinary and all-inclusive. You know, to share love with people who love us back is wonderful, but it is normal. To share drinks with friends who are like-minded is important—we all enjoy like-minded company, but there really isn’t anything special about it. Everybody does that. Instead we are commanded to share love beyond what is normal. Just this week, heard about a Trump supporter who welcomed a Muslim family into the neighborhood. Also met a male African American pastor on the east side of town who is a volunteer chaplain for our W-S police officers. Then there was the story about a liberal, progressive church who is gathering for one hour a week to pray for the current president and his administration. “They’ll know we are Christians by our love,” we sing. We look at the cross as our reminder of our calling. To live as ordinary people in an ordinary world, sharing God’s extraordinary love.

Conclusion: So Trinity, more than anything you value sharing God’s love. To share such love takes on a radical new meaning. God’s love rains down on the just and the unjust alike. And when we offer such an all-inclusive love, be assured: there is nothing ordinary about it.