

My Enemy, My Neighbor 2 Chronicles 28:8-15

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

How many of you know the prophet by the name of Oded? It is a rather obscure name. However, it is a name you have heard on the 13th Sunday after Trinity for the last seven years. He is mentioned three times (2 Chro. 15:1, 9; 28:9) in the book of 2nd Chronicles. Today, Oded stops a great tragedy from taking place.

At the time of our text, Israel is a divided nation – there is Kingdom of Judah and there is Kingdom of Israel. There isn't time for a history lesson, but suffice it to say that there was animosity going in both directions, Israel and Judah were divided because they were not on friendly terms. Samaria was a part of the Kingdom of Israel, and after God had used the Kingdom of Israel to discipline the Judah by defeat in combat, they were coming back to Samaria with the spoils.

Oded speaks up at this time. To paraphrase he says that God has used you to discipline Judah for their false worship, but you have gone far beyond discipline, you have let your anger with your enemy shine forth in your abuse in combat, and now you are showing your prejudice toward not only soldiers in combat but against civilians? This is wrong! They are our enemies, but we do not treat enemies this way.

But you know what, this account has the ring of truth. How do we treat those who treat us poorly? Germans were Krauts or Nazi in World Wars one and two and the Japanese were Japs or Nips. During the Vietnam conflict our enemies were Gooks. Today we're fighting ragheads and we lump all Muslims together. Animosity runs deep and strong so that we hate, and justify hating, all those in a particular people group because of how their leaders have corrupted and motivated them to act. After the last shot was fired, the battles over, were they still Krauts, Nazis, Japs, and Gooks? Do we continue in our prejudice? Any prejudice, is simply hatred disguised – whether toward an enemy or any people group – whether based upon military conflict, skin color, or any other reasoning.

But it isn't just people groups, sometimes it is individuals who we "hate" or are our "enemies."

And behold, a lawyer stood up to put Jesus to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."

But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

Trying to justify himself he asked, "who is my neighbor?" Who is my neighbor is code speak for, who is it that *I have to* love? Do I need to love Elmer Fezzwig, after what he did to me? Must I love Grant Grizzlewitz, because he hates my guts? Do I need to love Hegbert Herpolsheimer since I loaned him \$100 fifteen years ago, which he never paid back, and which he now claims I never loaned him? Do I need to love the guy who always calls me names at work? Do I need to love the gal who is always making up lies about me and spreading them as rumors all over town? Must I love everybody?

The answer to all those questions is, yes.

How are you to treat your enemies? Paul tells us. Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord. "BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Rom. 12:17-21)

That is the prescription that we are given. We are never to get payback. We are never to take our own revenge. We are to feed our enemies when they are hungry, and give them something to drink when thirsty. We are to overcome evil with good.

Jesus also has something to say in His sermon on the mount about how we are to treat our enemies. "But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also; and whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either. Give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back. Treat others the same way you want them to treat you. If you love those who love you, what credit is *that* to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is *that* to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is *that* to you? Even sinners lend to sinners in order to receive back the same *amount*. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil *men*. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. (Luke 6:27-36)

Did you hear those words of Jesus? Inserted in there is the golden rule, "treat others the same way you want them to treat you." Do we do that? We do not treat others as we want to be treated. We do not even treat our loved ones that way, much less our enemies.

We like to hold grudges. We like to hang on to hurts until we get our ounce of blood. But what does Jesus say? After giving us the Lord's Prayer He says, "For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions." (Matt. 6:14-15)

Rather than, "I forgive you," we say, "Don't worry about it," or, "No problem." We hold on to things without forgiving, and then in the heat of the moment, since they were never forgiven, we throw them into the argument and bring hurt and pain into the lives of our loved ones. Love your enemies? How can we love our enemies, we have a hard time forgiving our loved ones.

How are we to treat others? Jesus, still preaching His sermon on the mount had these tidbits. "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty *enough to go* into the fiery hell. Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering. (Matt. 5:21-24)

Do we come into God's house with problems still unresolved? Do we come into God's house unwilling to forgive and be reconciled with our neighbor?

You remember Oded from our text? Do you remember how he said that they had enough sins of their own without adding the sin of cruelty to their enemies?

We could sit and talk about the law. I could preach it some more. I don't know about you, but I already feel bad enough. The law has already convicted me of my sins. Thank goodness it does not have to end there. God's law drives us to repentance so that we can hear something different, something we are ready for when we are finally crushed into repentance. It is called the Gospel, the forgiveness of sins.

Paul says it this way in his letter to the Romans For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation. (Rom. 5:6-11)

The cost of forgiveness wasn't cheap, the very Son of God had to endure being ostracized by His own family members, chased out of His own hometown. Jesus loved those who hated Him, abused Him, and treated Him shamefully. Finally, after they made Him carry the instrument of His own death up the hill and nailed Him to it, He looked down upon them and begged His Father, "Father, forgive them!"

He did what we have failed to do and sacrificed that perfect love upon the cross so that He might deliver it to us. We can love, because He first loved us.

We are not here today because we are better than others, more loving and forgiving. We gather because we know that we are not. We gather so that Christ can give us of Himself in order that we might be different. We gather so that the forgiveness of God might come to us and flow through us to others. Although we were enemies of God, He has made us His beloved neighbors – His own children.

Jesus has granted us forgiveness, He delivers it to us in a word spoken to us. Although we are hungry, He feeds us of His own body. He quenched our thirst with His own precious blood. He clothes us with His own righteousness. And He gives us a place in His eternal kingdom. Thanks be to God in Christ Jesus, the Good Samaritan who rescues us. Amen.