

Mission Reflection

for the Season after Epiphany

Seafarers International House



Scripture

“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”¹

Message

By all indications, “loving our enemies” is going to be a little tough in 2017. It doesn’t appear to be a motto of the populist movements in the world’s democracies, and it certainly isn’t a precept of the Department of Homeland Security. In fact, today in geopolitical circles, loving our enemies falls somewhere between insane and unpatriotic.

So what are we to make of Jesus’ teachings? Can we selectively pick and choose which teachings to follow, forgo the remainder and rely upon the defense of Grace?

Maybe so, according to Gilbert Meilaender², discussing the moral ambiguities facing soldiers in wartime.³ The line between combat and war crimes is often hazy, because “the momentum of war may subvert our powers of moral reasoning . . .”⁴ Moral clarity, were it possible, may not be sufficient. How many soldiers return from combat with post-traumatic distress and need, at a minimum, pastoral care and the opportunity to reclaim [their] baptism and to acknowledge [their] dependence on God, “even to argue with God.”⁵

The problem for us today is that we label all sorts of social strife as “war”: the war on drugs, the war on terrorism, the war against drunk drivers and the war against

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The problem for us today is that we label all sorts of social strife as “war”: the war on drugs, the war on terrorism, the war against drunk drivers and the war against

crime. It isn't that combatting these evils isn't compelling; it's just not the stuff of war. The war mentality strengthens the belief that anything done to harm the bad guys is justifiable. Collateral damage is acceptable. How many unarmed civilians have been shot by police? And how many policemen, in turn, have been shot? The expanding war mentality in this Country is damaging to our civil rights and civil society. It is also damaging to our faith, which brings us back to Jesus and "love thy enemy".

Not every insult or perceived injustice needs a forceful response. Sometimes, it may be enough to turn the other cheek. After all, showing a little love often can diffuse tension, and even more, it may produce some harmony and understanding. Imagine what it could do for political discourse in the United States.

Prayer

O Lord, from whom all holy desires, all good counsels and all just works proceed, give unto thy servants that peace which the world cannot give; that our hearts may be set to obey thy commandments; and also that we, who are protected from fear of our enemies by your presence Lord, may pass our time in rest and quietude, through the merits of Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

1. *Matthew 5:38-48*
2. *Professor of Theological Ethics, Valparaiso University in Valparaiso, Indiana*
3. Gilbert Meilaender, "Facing Ambiguity in Warfare", *JOURNAL OF LUTHERAN ETHICS*, March 1, 2012
4. *Ibid*
5. *Ibid*

Postscript: You may not have thought of seafarers or immigrants as your enemies, but then you may not have regarded them as your friends or neighbors — you know, those folks who we are called to feed, to cloth and to visit. You could bake some cookies for seafarers, or you could visit some asylum seekers while they are locked up in detention centers and after they're granted asylum, you could invite them for an overnight visit in your home. You could anticipate that the seafarers and asylum seekers on the receiving end of your kindness would be grateful, but you'd be surprised at good you'd feel. For more information, log onto Seafarers International House's website (www.sihnyc.org).

Seafarers International House serves seafarers and immigrants with pastoral care, hospitality, social assistance, advocacy and prayer in the ports in Baltimore, Connecticut, New Jersey, New York and Philadelphia, and in an 84-room Guesthouse in Manhattan. The Guesthouse accommodates more than seafarers and immigrants. It's available for church gatherings, civic groups and individuals in need of safe, affordable lodging. Our Guesthouse helps them accomplish their mission goals, and their patronage helps us accomplish ours. "Sleep Well By Doing Good."

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