

PRAYER PF GATHERING

THE WORD OF GOD

Matthew 16:24-27

24 Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 25 **For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.** 26 For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?

27 "For the Son of Man is to come with His angels in the glory of his Father, and then He will repay everyone for what has been done.

Romans 12.9-18

9 Let love be genuine; **LET GO of** what is evil, hold fast to what is good; 10 love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. 11 Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. 12 Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. 13 Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. 14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. 16 Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. 17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.

18 If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, **live peaceably with all.**

Hate??? What is Evil

I expect you noticed how this passage began differently than the traditional reading. Translating Greek into English allows many options but I believe this is truest to the spirit of Paul's writing. We are not called to hate anything, or anyone. I would like to expand on this belief.

When Paul says "9 Let love be genuine; **hate** what is evil, hold fast to what is good" he really means "**LET GO of** what is evil, hold fast to what is good." This links the phrase better than the traditional reading and his call to "hold fast to what is good." Or at least I believe it does.

Over the last several months we have been exposed to the angry and fearful sides of the world and our nation. We have seen rioting, attacks on protesters, attacks on the President, innocent people shot down by rioters **and police**, and then there are the struggles of the world's people. This is **evil** and requires we act to restore good, not stand with those that deny Christ's teachings. We are never to respond with **hate**. When we exam Jesus' actual teachings, this is very clear. Let's recall a few.

Invite the People to Name teachings

Here are some of Mine!!!

Turn the other cheek

Do not return evil with evil

Feed my sheep

The Least of these...

Love one another

Love your neighbor as you love yourself

In Paul's letter to the Roman church, and to us, he wants the church to understand that they are **called to a different way of life**. He explains in very direct ways what this means. We are to love one another with genuine love.

This love is a way of life, not simply an emotional feeling.

Did you know that in the early church, the followers of Jesus were not known as Christians? Most often they were described by their admirers, and their critics, as "**The Followers of the Way**."

This name was used because those faithful to God and Christ lived a **new way of life**; a life that was radically different from the community around them.

Many of the cultures around them practiced the abandonment of children who were deformed, or who were orphaned in childbirth. The Followers of the Way saw that this was wrong, and they went into the desert around Jerusalem, and other cities in the region, and rescued these babies, and cared for them.

This was because they remembered the teachings of the Old Testament to **care for widows and orphans**, and the Followers of the Way gathered them up into their community and provided for them.

The followers understood that they owed their allegiance to God, and one another, so they sold their property, and created a common pool of money to provide for the needs of all. They lived in a way that many would call Communism today. The world around them did not understand their way of life, and eventually they were persecuted for it, as they would be today, but they did not stop living as they had been taught. **It was a different way of life that all Followers of the way are called to live.**

It also means we must give to the needs of the saints; that is, we must give to all those who live in the faith, locally, nationally, internationally. This is the foundation of our understanding of how to be **Church**. **We** use our collective

gifts to support our Presbytery, our denomination, mission to our neighbor, mission to the world. It is thru our collective gifts Presbyterian Missions will help the people recover from natural disasters. Paul also challenges us to bless those who persecute us, to **love our enemy**. If we repay evil with evil, then we are no different from our enemies. **We are not living in a new way**. If we fight among ourselves, if we hold grudges against our sister, or brother, we are no different than the rest of the world. If we think we are better, or wiser, than our fellow disciples, or our neighbor, we are no better than the world.

Paul challenges us to live drastically differently from the world around us. He says, "If your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." If Jesus commands that we do this for our enemy, how can we do less for our friend, our neighbor, our sisters and brothers?

I believe that for the Christian faith to matter in the 21st century, it must call people to live in a way that is different from the way the culture would teach us to live. We are Americans. We have been taught that means we should be independent. We should be self sufficient. We must make our own way, thinking of self first. Forget the consequences, just do it. We are told to look like Barbie or Ken. We are told to teach the world our American way of life, even as we have the highest infant mortality rate of any industrial nation, the highest drug use rates, the highest crime rate, the highest suicide rates, and one of the highest illiteracy rates. You name it. **If it is an issue about a quality of life, we are not always the leader in the world.**

Now don't get me wrong. I am proud to be an American, and I'm proud of our history on human rights and liberty. I have traveled to several countries and seen how well we live. Or, many of us live well. We have done many things well, and having traveled to several nations, I give thanks that I was

born here, **but we can do better**. Winston Churchill is quoted as saying “**It has been said** that democracy is the worst form of Government, except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time.... I think that as Christians, we can lead our nation, and world, to be a better place, but not by our words and condemnation of the way it is, **but by our actions**.”

Paul understood what Christ had taught. He understood that what we do says volumes more than what we say. And of course he reminds us that when we behave as the world behaves, we deny what we believe, what our scriptures teach us about love, peace and God.

So what does this mean for us? I think there are three direct consequences of these texts. First, we must work to do better by one another. In our lives together, we will have disagreements, arguments. That is natural since we will often see issues differently. In those times of disagreement, we must refuse to say hurtful things. We must be honest with one another when someone hurts us with their words, or actions. We must be brave enough to go and work to be reconciled with those that have hurt us, remembering it is their actions that we don't love, not them.

We must also be more deliberate about caring for one another. That means helping your sister or brother when they are ill. That means calling or sending a card. It means giving money when we know someone has an emergency need like the hurricanes this week, or fires in California.

It also means we **must not be** so proud that we will not ask for help when we need it. **That may be the hardest act of all.**

Lastly, we can no longer stay inside these walls, safe and nourished, ignoring the needs of our neighbor. It is good and right that we make gifts to worthy missions around the world, like the Heifer Project, or 5 Cents a Meal, or

building houses with Habitat, or making sandwiches for a homeless shelter, **but it isn't enough**. We must find our mission in this community that will allow us to stand face to face, side by side, with those needing our love and help. Then they will know that they too are a part of our community, they may even learn to know God by our acts. I don't know what our mission is, but together we can find it.

There are children left alone in the afternoons because there are not enough after school programs to meet their needs, or because they can't afford them. There are seniors in this neighborhood who are alone and need fellowship, spiritual nurturing, and **not just on Sunday**. Maybe you could provide a center for daytime fellowship, making our facilities a gathering place for them with the help of the Council on Aging.

There are many people in this neighborhood who need help with small home repairs, and you could do that. There is a growing need for Foster parents and Guardian Ad Lithium's in every community as drug use grows. When you begin to look, you will find many opportunities.

Of course, there are hundreds who don't know that living before God can change your life, give it purpose, give it comfort. Jesus instructed us to go into all nations, proclaiming the Gospel and living the Gospel so that others become disciples. They don't know there is a different way to live. **But we can teach them to live without HATE. To see God's hand in all of creation. To SHOW LOVE to all.**

Thanks be to God for a different way to Live. Amen.

Wherever you are as you read this, Take a moment with your family, or friends, to remember the blessings the Lord's Supper symbolizes for our lives and give thanks.

OUR RESPONSE TO THE WORD.

PRAYER OF GREAT THANKSGIVING

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise to the Lord.....

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE AND THE LORD'S PRAYER

BREAKING OF THE BREAD, POURING OF THE CUP

When Jesus and his disciples began the Passover meal, Jesus took Bread, and after giving thanks, broke it, Saying, "This is my body broken for you. Take, share, eat and remember me.:

After the meal, Jesus took the Cup and said, "This is the cup of salvation, filled with my blood, shed for the forgiveness of YOUR sins. Take, drink, each of you."

The Apostle Paul wrote, "Every time we eat this bread and drink of this cup we proclaim the saving grace of our Lord's life and death until the time He gathers home with Him."

PRAYER OF DEDICATION

THE SENDING

Let us go out: witnessing to the Love of God revealed in Christ, seeking justice for all of God's creation, daring to be disciples of Jesus, who asks nothing less than our all, and who shapes and enables us to be, and do, more than we can imagine. Amen.