

Lenten Devotional

2020

Monday, March 23, 2020
Day 23, Exodus 23

Love Your Enemy

If you come across your enemy's ox or donkey wandering off, be sure to return it. (Exodus 23:4)

I used to have a personal slogan, "everybody loves Dave." It was arrogant, which matched my personality and it was a coverup for how insecure I was. It also, from time to time, proved to be false. I have a string of faces from my lifetime of guys (for some reason the girls don't have the same gravity) who have just not liked me. There was a kid in grade 1, a guy at Scott Mission Camp (several summers), and a dude on a Vision Trip to Congo with me. There was just instant dislike that was physically displayed. I could never really understand it, because generally I was liked by people.

One of the things I love about the Bible is its level of honesty. I could probably take a lot of time to talk about this, but for now let me say that the Bible doesn't dress itself up. It's not idealized; it's gritty. Take this passage. I once asked a congregation if Christians have enemies. I received a lot of pious answers, but I had to point out that Jesus calls us to love our enemies, therefore we must have them. Here we are as Israel is being formed into a holy nation of priests and right off the top, we see the presence of enemies.

I believe that it is only by coming to grips with the fact that we continue to be real human beings with real things like enemies that Scripture can transform us. The Bible doesn't let us hide behind our pious notions of what God wants. He won't let us say, "Oh, I don't have enemies." Yes, you do and so do I. We can have good or bad reasons for having them. But, we have them. And, only by coming to face that truth can we hear what God says to us about loving our enemies.

We might think, in our piousness, that we should refrain from harming anyone we don't like. But, that's not what Scripture is saying. A comedian once said, "I'm a good guy, I swerve to miss people." It's funny because it's true. We have decided that refraining from violence is how we should handle people we don't like. Nope. Scripture gives us a picture of loving action for the benefit and welfare of those who hate us. This, of course, is the heart of the cross, "Father, forgive them..."

If we refuse to acknowledge our enemy then we have no hope of loving them. If we do not love our enemies then we have failed to embody the gospel which means our witness of words do not match our action. Rather, we must name our enemies so we know who to love and to whom to take our witness. Only then can we be a holy nation of priests who intercede between God and the world.

Prayer

Lord, we made ourselves your enemies, but you loved us anyway. You saw our tragic condition and condescended to us with loving compassion. You did not leave us in our sorry state, but you lifted us up and seated us at your table. You adopted us and made us yours. Help us to live that out with those who hate us and those who are our enemies. Amen.