

Pastor T.C. Arnold
13th Sunday after Trinity
2 Chronicles 28:8-15
August 30th, 2015

There is not much uglier in this world than civil war. Brother against brother... family against family. What sort of devastating circumstance would possibly put blood against blood in such a horrific way? What kind of division could lead a people who are supposed to be untied as one into two warring factions?

Well, in the Old Testament text for today, the reasons for such a civil war – a war of Israel against Judah – a war of people from the same family... all children of Jacob who was later called Israel, came through a division that took place when Solomon's son, Rehoboam caused Israel to split from their family, Judah in the southern part of the Promised Land. The reason... many different disagreements over who was supposed to be the king. But mainly, they loved themselves more than they loved their brother or sister in the Lord. They loved "other gods," false gods more than their brother or sister. There was not enough room in their lives to love one another... or even enough room to love the Lord God.

So, it says in the text that through the prophet Oded, because the Lord was displeased with the faithlessness of Judah, He gave them over into the hands of their own family. Judah had a king at the time called Ahaz and he was a terrible king. He reigned sixteen years in Judah and caused much grief for the people. He made metal images for the Baals and required the people to worship these false gods. He even burned his own sons as an offering to these false gods. He made countless offerings, it says in the scriptures, everywhere he went – on every high place, on every hill, and under every green tree.

But evil didn't just belong to Ahaz and Judah. It also belonged to Israel. It says in the text that God used Israel to show Judah and Ahaz their terrible folly. But Israel abused their power. It says in the text, "*The Lord, the God of your fathers, was angry with Judah, he gave them into your hand, but you have killed them in a rage that has reached up to heaven.*" Their anger and hate for their own family caused them to rage out against Judah. Israel treated people with terrible contempt. They made slaves of them. They mistreated them and killed them in horrible ways. God would not stand for this kind of hate.

Hate makes a person do terrible things. Hate makes a person do regrettable things. Hate makes people like you and me – who, for the most part are kind to people and seem to get along with the rest of society, to think and act in terrible ways. Hate makes us want to get even instead of turn the other cheek. That "turn the other cheek" thing is really hard. It's easier to hold grudges and hate from a distance – or even feel vindicated when we are able to hurt those we hate in some way or form. That is why, beloved in the Lord, you must hate the right things.

"*Hate evil and love what is good,*" says the prophet Amos. Hate sin and turn away from it. Don't let hate rule over you. Don't let hate take up residence in your heart. That is no way to live. You will hurt no one but yourself if you let hate or anger rule your day. The hate and anger that turns our thoughts and actions into misdeeds are all sins. Repent! Hate, not your neighbor or even your enemy. Hate evil. Hate sin. Stand against it by living out the Christian faith. Make your whip made of cords like Jesus in the temple and drive out evil. But don't hate your enemy. Love your enemy.

Jesus says while preaching His sermon on the mount, "*You have heard it said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.*" That's hard. Jesus knew it was hard. Especially when your enemies, the enemies of truth, call out in anger and hatred toward you. Especially when they rise up against you and make you do what you don't want to do. Especially when they impose themselves on you, or tell you that you

believe lies and the first thing you need to do is unlearn the lies you have been taught – then you will be free to believe whatever it is you want. We want to hate people like this. But don't

Love them instead. Love your enemy and pray for them. Jesus tells a story that goes something like this: A man was on a road, he fell among robbers. They left him for dead. Men who were supposed to help him got scared and instead of helping him they acted like he wasn't there, walked quickly passed him and went on their way. The one who was not supposed to help – because he was an enemy – stopped and helped the man. He cared for him and spent all kinds of money to make sure he remains well. Jesus tells this parable to remind us that our neighbor is any human being. Love your neighbor. Hate evil. Hate sin. But love your enemy.

This does not mean that we should not go to war over just causes. No, the Bible doesn't say that. Sometimes, as you know and have observed, that our country takes up arms against tyranny, hate, and violence. Sometimes we show our love for our neighbor by going up against evil with our neighbor. God's people in the Bible went to war against such things, and God even prompted the people in this way when such things were necessary. But we dare not go beyond what we are allowed... into the realm of hating our enemy and taking vengeance out on our own accord.

For example, in the Old Testament story those certain chiefs from Ephraim stood up against those who were mistreating their enemies. The chiefs gave the captives from Judah clothes, food, and even anointed them which means they poured expensive oil on their wounds and bound them up. They showed exceptional mercy to those they were supposed to hate. They loved their enemy.

This is counter intuitive, isn't it? Our fallen human nature of "getting even" and "hate back what hates you" makes this kind of love extremely difficult to understand. We will spend our whole lives trying to understand this. All of us will.

But here is what I don't want you to be confused about. This is the kind of love that our Lord shows you – each day – to the enemies of our Lord. That even when we act as enemies of our Lord in our own sins, when we disobey actively and openly, the Lord still loves you. His love for those who disobey goes against reason... why would anyone continue to love that which shows no love – even acts out against? It's a mercy and love that goes beyond understanding. But know this... it is a mercy and love that is for real and the Lord demonstrates it.

How could Jesus love those who were shouting murderous words on Good Friday? Did Jesus love the members of the Sanhedrin that hit him, spit on him, and called him every name in the book? Did He love both men on the cross – one on His right and one on His left – though one of them mocked him? The answer is yes. Go and do likewise.

Beloved, most people understand this parable in the Gospel lesson wrong. People think we are the Samaritan who helps the man in need. More likely Jesus wants us to know that we are the man lying in the street half dead. And the one who is hated, who is often ignored, who is the Samaritan is the Lord Himself. He comes a long and bandages up your wounds, even the wounds of someone who hates him. He is the one who paid the expensive price to make sure you are well. Jesus is the Samaritan – hated, but yet showing love. He is our example of how to treat a neighbor. He is also sharing with us a very important lesson of the Gospel. He is the one who loves so much that He would never ignore you. He comes and binds up the wounds of the dying. He is the one who pays the expensive price. He is the one who brings us, who are separated from Him in our sins, back into a precious relationship with Him.

There is not much uglier than civil war. Yet, while this is true, and it is human nature to war against, our Lord binds us up, puts clothes on us. Feeds us – yes even those who are called enemies. This is a love that knows no bounds. This is the greatest love of all. And we have it. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.