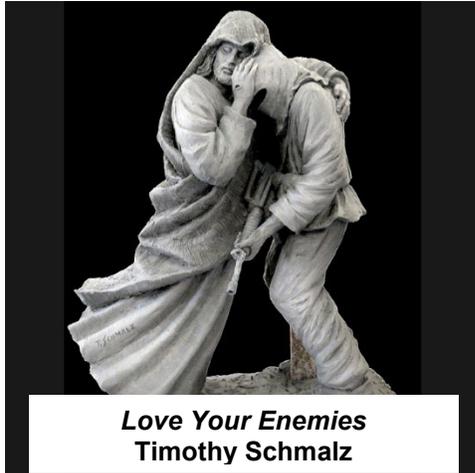


REFLECTIONS FOR THE SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME ~ 20 February 2022

The Mount ~ The Residence at Litledale

“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you” (Lk 6:27). I do not have any enemies, so today’s readings do not have much to say to me. I expect that is what most of us would conclude. And then we hear Jesus’s first words, “I say to you that listen.” While we may not use the word “enemies” to speak about people in our lives, we know that there are many whom we find it difficult to love.



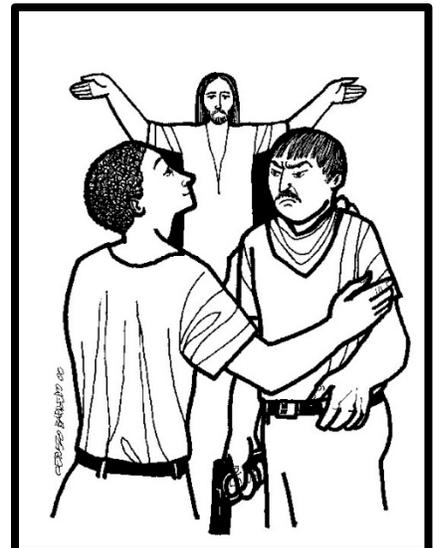
Love Your Enemies
Timothy Schmalz

When Jesus tells us to love our neighbours as ourselves or to welcome strangers, we understand and accept it. But it is much more difficult to love those who do not like us, those who have hurt us in the past in our own family or among our Sisters in community, those who have not shown us respect or whose decisions have caused us harm. It is so difficult to love people who do not think like us or share our values or respect what we respect. It is so difficult for us to love people who have harmed others by stealing from them or cheating on them or physically or sexually abusing them. It is so difficult for us to love those who have caused wars or violent protests or drug wars or those who have entrapped people through human trafficking.

Does Jesus really mean that we should love them? Apparently so! The story of David and Saul in our first reading gives an example of a person who had an opportunity for revenge and chose instead to show compassion. David spared Saul because he believed that Saul was precious to God and, therefore, was precious to David. As I have quoted many times, Dorothy Stang and (the American sister who was martyred in Brazil in 2005 for her work among the poorest people in that country) haunts me with her words, “You love God as much as you love the person whom you love least.”

What does loving such people mean? Jesus is also clear about that – do good to them, bless them, pray for them, offer them from your own plenty, be merciful to them. This does not mean that people who do wrong should not be held accountable. But it does mean being merciful to them as God is merciful to all of God’s creatures. Pope Francis used this quotation from Luke’s Gospel as the theme for the Year of Mercy in 2016, “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.” Today’s Psalm 103 describes what this merciful God looks like – it is a direct quotation from Exodus 34 when Moses asks God who God is. “The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love” (Ps 103:8). Verses 4 and 13 repeat the words steadfast love, mercy, and compassion.

These words – steadfast love, gracious, mercy, compassion – are all mercy words with each one having its own reflection of mercy. “Steadfast love” and “mercy” are the translations of the Hebrew word *hesed* which refers to the covenant love between



Love Your Enemies
Cerezo Barredo

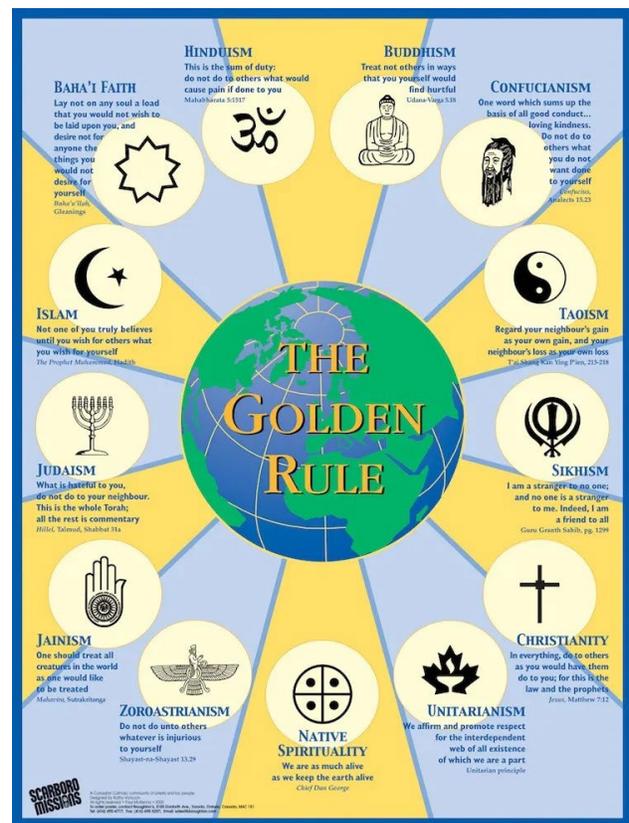
God and the chosen people, the love that is rooted in right relationships. In our time, we understand this steadfast love or *hesed* in the new awareness that we are all part of the sacred communion of all creation, bound by the love of the Creator whose love became incarnate in the creation of the universe. The word “compassion” is translated from the Hebrew *rahamim* which means womb-love, the love a mother feels for her yet-to-be-born child, a deep and tender feeling of compassion which is aroused by the sight of weakness or suffering. This is the word which Jesus uses in his invitation to us to “Be merciful,” the Greek word *oiktirmones*. And the word “gracious” is the translation of the Hebrew *hanan*, grace or favour, a disposition which is permanent, kind, gracious and generous. These are the qualities of loving our enemies which are at the heart of who God is and which are at the heart of who we are called to become.

During this coming week, I encourage you to reflect on these words alive in your life. Practice *hesed* as you imagine one of God’s creatures other-than-human whom you do not like or who scares you (possibly mosquitoes or snakes or . . .) but whom you share in this sacred communion of all creation. Practice *rahamim* as you suffer with someone in pain in mind or body or spirit. Prayer with them, listen to their story, be with them in their pain and suffering. Practice *hanan* with someone whom you feel does not like you – be gracious and generous to them in a special way this week. Be merciful in all the ways that your compassionate God is merciful.

The Gospel passage also quotes one of the most famous of all religious sayings known as the Golden Rule, “Do to others as you would have them do to you” (Lk 6:31). Every major world religion has some form of this same teaching in its sacred writings, echoing Jesus words about how we are to treat each other. How important this teaching must be if every religious tradition in the East and in the West take it so seriously!

Some examples include the following:

- ✓ Buddhism – “Do not offend others as you would not want to be offended” (Udanavarga 5:18).
- ✓ Islam – “None of you are true believers until you love for your brother or sister what you love for yourself” (Prophet Muhammad).
- ✓ Judaism – “What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. This is the whole Torah; all the rest is commentary” (Hillel, Talmud, Shabbat 31a).
- ✓ Confucianism – Tzu-kung asked, “Is there one word which can serve as the guiding principle for conduct throughout life?” Confucius said, “It is the word altruism (shu). Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you” (Analects 15:23).
- ✓ Sikhism – “I am a stranger to no one; and no one is a stranger to me. Indeed, I am a friend to all” (Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1299).
- ✓ Taoism – “Regard your neighbor’s gain as your own gain and your neighbor’s loss as your own loss” (T’ai Shang Kan Ying P’ien, 213–218).

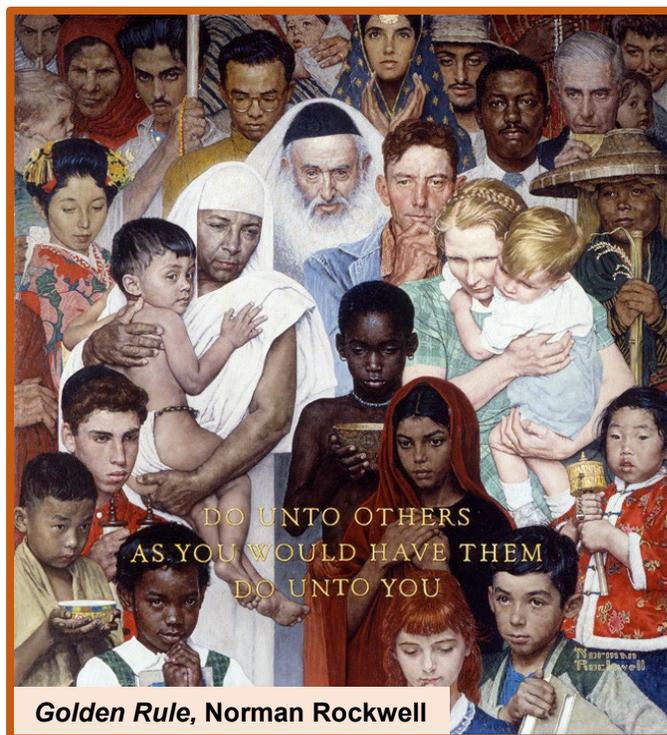


The Scarborough Missions Golden Rule Poster

- ✓ Jainism – “One should treat all creatures in the world as one would like to be treated” (Mahavira, Suttrakritanga).
- ✓ Indigenous Spirituality – “We are much alive as we keep the Earth alive” (Chief Dan George).

Susan Mark Landis speaks for all of us, in this profound prayer:

Lord, the hardest thing you asked
 was that we love our enemies.
 We know how we would like to love them:
 We would love our enemies to be far away.
 We would love them
 not to compromise our security.
 We would love them not to scare us
 or change the way we live.
 We would love them to be lovable.
 You know, God, we would love it to be popular
 to love enemies.
 We would love our neighbors to respect us
 for this good deed.
 We would love the people on the news
 to provide examples of how to love.
 But then, if loving enemies were easy,
 Jesus would not have told us about the tax
 collectors and gentiles,
 Who love only their friends.
 If loving enemies were easy, we know
 We would not need God's strong arms to bear
 us up in difficult times.



Golden Rule, Norman Rockwell

We would not need the blood of Christ to save us from human sin.
 We would not need the Spirit flowing among us, wiping our tears.
 We would not need the Bible to tell us what the world does not.
 God of all mercy,
 Who loved us when we were your sinful enemies,
 Who saved us through your immeasurable grace,
 Who gave us a gift we did not deserve,
 Let us imitate you by loving those who are yet our enemies.
 Teach us to know how to love enemies,
 To wish them the best of the life you intend each human to have,
 And then pray and act so those wishes come true.
 Teach us hope, so we know that with your blessing, impossible dreams become reality.
 Teach us faith, so we know that only the strength to stop hating
 will halt the cycles of violence and revenge.
 Teach us forgiveness, which we know is suffering love through piercing tears.
 Teach us, O Lord, your ways.
 When our community looks at our congregation,
 Hears our words and sees our deeds,
 Help them to know that you, the God of love, live among us
 And that they can come to us to learn about Christian love of enemies.