



BELLVILLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

A Congregation of the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa

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Wash the feet of your enemies

Leviticus 19:9-18

Romans 12:25-37

John 13:1-17

~ **Brent Russell** ~

- **Warrick Smart** the minister in Pinetown came to preach at Durbanville some years ago
- And if you know Warrick he is a real **grandstander**
- And he gets into the pulpit and eyes out the congregation for a minute
- And then **announces** in his loudest voice "Today I am going to hammer you from the pulpit, because I am a visiting preacher and I can!"
- The message that I believe God wants us to hear is a **tough message**
- **So I don't want to hammer you**
- But this message will **challenge you to quite radically** change certain aspects of our lives
- **Jesus always preached tough messages**
- He preached them with **love and compassion**
- But he did not pull the punches

- He preached about a **grace that was costly** - it cost Him his life
- He preached a message of **absolute uncompromising discipleship**
- And he preached of a **love for our fellow person that is expensive** - it will cost you energy and time
- The authors of **Leviticus, Romans and John** have written these passages to tell the people of God how to live out our relationships here and now
- **Not just certain relationships**
- But all relationships with all those we share this wonderful world with
- These passages are powerful instructions on how to relate to the people around us

- They tell us how to deal with those who are **poor** and those who are **wealthy**
- They tell us how to treat the **disabled**
- How to treat the **guilty**
- How to treat the **happy**
- How to treat the **mourning**
- How to treat those who are **evil**
- How to treat those who **persecute** you

- And it is normally those who are evil, those who persecute those who have wronged us that we have the greatest difficulty relating to

- There is was an old song by a band called Erasure "**How I love to hate you**"
- And we all have someone we love to hate don't we
- We love to hate old Robert **Mugabe**
- We love to hate **Osama** Bin Laden and **Saddam** Hussein
- We love to hate the **Sharks** rugby team

- **Some of those people we hate may have done very little to us**
- **But in many situations we have been hurt very deeply by others**
- **They have hurt us or they have hurt our families**
- **Sometimes they are people who just irritate us to the core of our being for whatever reason**

Love your neighbor as yourself

- *In Leviticus 19:18 Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.*
- **We all learned in Sunday school the wonderful story of the neighborly love of the good Samaritan**
- **And "who is my neighbor?" the teacher asked Jesus and Jesus speaks of this parable**
- **Love those who you traditionally hate, is the answer Jesus gives**
- **Don't just love those who can do something for you**
- **Don't love only those who are related to you**
- **Or are of your own race or culture**
- **Love everyone as you love yourself**
- **For many centuries the Jews allowed a hatred to creep into their lives**
- **They had become haughty in their place of being God's chosen people**
- **There was a spiritual arrogance that had crept into their thinking**
- **And in many ways us Christians as "The Church" have allowed ourselves to become like the Jews**
- **I believe that even as individuals we have allowed these kind of attitudes to creep into our lives about others**
- **That we might somehow be better than, or holier than them**

- **Whatever our reason** for letting these attitudes and emotions wash over us
- **There is no place for them in the minds of Godly people**

- The author of Leviticus was trying to teach Israel a **simple lesson**
- **Love others as we love ourselves**
- **Not love some as we love ourselves**
- **Love all others as we love ourselves**

- There is no place in the Christian life for hate or for bitterness
- No matter what the reason you may have for feeling that way
- We need to love our neighbors as ourselves

- **God does not give these commands to make our lives a misery**
- These commands were given to **protect us from ourselves**

- **I am sure you all know someone who is full of anger towards another**
- It **feeds all those negative emotions** and attitudes within them - bitterness, rage, slander, anger and malice
- It feeds their sense of **self importance**
- It becomes **like a worm** that eats away at their insides until they are hollow, shallow people
- **They ruin themselves because of their attitude towards others**

- **It is for our own good that we are called to live differently to others**
- **To love our neighbors as ourselves - a command for God's holy people**

Bless those who curse you

- In Romans Paul echoes the sentiment of the Levitical author
 - In fact in many ways the two passages are **virtually identical**
 - In chp 12 Paul writes **"Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse"**
- Talk for a moment amongst yourselves - what does it mean to bless?
- It's literal translation means to **say good things about** or
 - **It means to prosper, to be made happy**
 - So Paul really is telling us to **say good things** about those who have wronged us
 - **Wish our persecutors to prosper**
 - **We must hope that those who have deeply hurt us should be happy**
 - **To seek the best for those whom we have every reason to despise**
- Sounds horrible doesn't it
 - Normally we react to when someone mentions this persons name with **grumble**
grumble
- **Jesus is challenging us in a radical way**
 - As we read through the Gospels we are continually challenged by Jesus requests of us
 - **The rich young ruler** was told to give up all his wealth
 - **The disciples were called away** from all they knew to follow Jesus
 - **Jesus radically opposed the prevailing religious** view about sinners and outcasts
- **Jesus calls us to be radically different from the worldly way of thinking**

- We have become new creations with **new minds and with new hearts**
- Discipleship of Jesus is a radical thing
- Jesus always expects more than what is easy to do
- If there is an easy way out, Jesus will expect you to take step further

- **It is one thing to move away from hatred, bitterness and anger**
- **Most people can get it right** to move away from hating those who persecute them
- **They don't always do it**
- But for the most part it is reasonably easy to do

- But Jesus expects us to take this a step further
- **Don't stop there he says** - don't just stop hating them
- To merely stop hating is to **walk only half the way there**
- **No, Bless those who persecute you**
- In South Africa we had the **TRC the truth and reconciliation commission**
- And whilst in places it may have had its faults
- The TRC made massive steps towards reconciling people
- And it was heart wrenching to hear stories of abuse, violence and murder coming from the mouths of those who had committed these crimes
- But the most touching aspect of the TRC was when - and this happened often - the victim was able to reach out and bless the persecutor
- When people who had been living with all sorts of bitterness and anger against those who had hurt them and their families where able to reach out and forgive

- **Jesus preaches a radical message of reconciliation**
- **Not a half hearted attempt and just forgetting or letting the anger go**
- **But Jesus calls us to walk the whole way**

- To bless and forgive those who persecute us
- To seek the absolute best for them
- To want them to prosper
- To say nice things about them
- Bless those who hurt you
- Love others as yourselves
- Seek the best for your enemy

Conclusion

- For most people, **grudges** are hard to give up
- **We love to cling to them, we find some sense of perverse security in them**
- **We love to hate those who have hurt or ridiculed us**

- For the **abused wife** it is rewarding to hate the husband that beats
- For the **raped** it is easier to deal with the pain to hate the rapist
- For the **scholar who is teased** remorselessly it is natural to detest the bully
- For the **retrenched** it is easy to loathe your ex-boss
- For the **cheated** it is natural to be disgusted by the adulterer
- We all in some area of our life have those whom we love to hate
- People we wish we would never have to see again
- Sometimes the reasons may be entirely valid
- At other places we may be being childish
- **Let me close by looking at the passage in John 13**
- Jesus washes the feet of his disciples one by one
- **He washes the feet of all 12**
- He too washes the feet of **Judas Iscariot**
- The **friend who had walked** and talked with Jesus on his travels
- The **friend who had eaten many meals** with Jesus sharing food together

- **The friend who finally betrays Jesus to death**
- I want you to imagine for a moment that you are in that room
- Imagine that you are Jesus
- You're kneeling on the ground with a pot of water between your knees
- And you are washing the feet of your friends
- And one by one you find yourself looking up at the faces of those you love
- And you gently and carefully clean their feet in an act of love and of service
- And then you find yourself looking up from a foot to the face of an enemy
- The person who's foot you are about to wash is the one who has hurt you most
- The person who's foot you are going to wash is the one who may yet hurt you more than you may know
- I have tried to imagine the emotions that were going through Jesus mind as he did this
- As he washed the betrayers feet what was he thinking?
- What was he wishing?
- These are things we will never know, but being as human as you and I Jesus would probably have wanted to react much like you and I

- But Jesus showed no favoritism
- No bias
- Jesus treated Judas as he did the rest of the disciples
- He treated Judas as one of those whom he loved

- Jesus did not hate but even though Judas would betray Him
- Jesus still served Him
- still loved him
- still gently and tenderly washed Judas feet
- That is the kind of radical Christianity we are called to live out
- To love those who persecute

- To serve them
- To bless them
- To forgive them
- Close your eyes with me
- I want you to picture the face your enemy
- I want you to imagine them in your mind sitting in front of you
- Lets pray