

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Mark Twain is credited as having said

"It ain't the parts of the Bible that I can't understand that bother me, it is the parts that I do understand."

Whether he said it or not, I would say that this weekend's Gospel falls in this category. Jesus tells us

**Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.** (Luke 6:27-28)

This seems to be perfectly clear and understandable – and it bothers me! Enemies wouldn't be enemies if they were easy to love. Yet this is a direct command from Jesus.

Jesus does not only command this, but He exemplifies it for us. We see over and over again how Jesus shows His love for those who have made themselves enemies to Him. Over and over again, Jesus reached out to those who hated Him, hurt Him, mistreated Him. From the cross, Jesus blessed and forgave those who crucified Him (see Luke 23:34). The disciples ran from Him and denied Him, yet His words at the resurrection were, "Peace be with you" (Luke 24:36; John 20:19, 21, 26). The greatest example of Jesus loving His enemies is "while we were still sinners Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

So Jesus shows us by His example that we are to love our enemies and bless those who curse us. I know how difficult it is even trying to smile – I mean genuinely smile – at someone who annoys me! Yet, this is the command of Jesus. It is not a random command, but one that shows us the very Heart of God, and how we are to become like God.

From my own experience, I can tell you that this truly starts with "**pray[ing] for those who mistreat you**" (Luke 6:28). I remember when this became real for me. I was a new pastor, and somehow I had managed to get under certain parishioners' skins. I'm not sure how that happened since I am such a loveable guy [tongue in cheek]! They did lots of little things to make my life as pastor difficult. I really struggled with them. This Gospel came up, and I was struck to the heart! I knew I had to do something. After trying to reach out to them in love (I didn't do well, because I didn't have much love for them), I decided to pray for them, actively, consciously, consistently. It took time, but over time, the more I prayed, the more I found that my heart was changing toward these people. True, they still annoyed me and got under my skin, but I found I *wanted* to love them. It changed me. Over more time of praying – actively, consciously, consistently – I found that they started to love me back. The animosity slowly disappeared, and we found that we actually began to enjoy each other's company.

What grace!

Don't you think Jesus knew what He was talking about?! You see, every person is beloved of God. He loves each person – yes, even the politicians with whom you disagree, He loves with an overwhelming, never-ending, reckless love! And He so wants His children to love each other.

I would say that loving our enemies is impossible. We *can't* do it. Yet, with God's grace, the impossible becomes possible. Prayer opens us to that grace, softening our hard hearts. Think about the person or people that are the hardest for you to deal with – maybe they are family, neighbors, or coworkers. Maybe they are people you've never met, like the people who try to take advantage of you over the phone or internet, or people in government. Each person is beloved of God. Whoever these people are, begin to pray for them – actively, consciously, consistently. With patience and perseverance, you will see how God's grace can change our hearts, making the impossible possible! He will give us the grace to love even our enemies!