



Who are our 'enemies'?

**Sermon by the Rev Simon Kim
Sunday 23 February 2025**

Gospel Reading: Luke 6:27-38

When I officiate at weddings, I often bless the bride and groom with this: "From now on, you will be able to practice Jesus' command 'every day, at home.' That command is to love your neighbor and love your enemy."

Love, by its very nature, is about shifting all attention from 'me' to 'you': if I starve, you eat; if I fail, you succeed. But there's a problem. Because I have an undeniably selfish nature, even when I think about or practice love, the starting point is always me.

Of course, being 'self-focused' or 'egocentric' can be a positive and dynamic way of valuing myself, but most of the time it ends up twisting into selfishness or leading to violence towards others.

Since ancient times, humanity has been bound by the fear that "if I have something, others cannot, and if others have it, I must starve." We are not free from this fear. This is an uncomfortable truth.

We already know that disarmament is the only answer for peace, yet the world spends astronomical budgets on increasing weapons of mass destruction. Every year, we suffer from extreme disasters due to the greenhouse effect, yet environmental activists' pleas to turn off air conditioners and stop factory operations for just one day remain unanswered. Selfishness, combined with vague fears, is what stands in the way of peace on this earth where we must coexist.

And yet, for us, Jesus commands us to 'love our enemies'.

You may disagree with me, but we humans are incapable of 'loving' in the true sense of the word. You may rightly ask, 'Why? Isn't there also the love that parents have for their children and wives for their husbands?'

My answer is the same: no, because even such noble 'love' always has 'me' at its centre, and so our love is always lopsided.

I often confess that 'the gospel of Jesus makes me uncomfortable', and today's biblical text is particularly so. Jesus speaks of a way of life that we find hard to accept.

Surely, it's much easier for me to live by 'an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth', but Jesus says, 'love your enemies, bless those who curse you and pray for those who abuse you'. He tells us to turn the other cheek when you are slapped, and if someone takes your outer garment, give them your inner garment. It's a command that is obviously so far removed from our nature that it makes us feel terribly uncomfortable.

But what we need to think about is 'to whom' is this command given? Verse 27, where today's passage begins, says this 'But to you who are listening to me, I say.' 'You who are listening to me' refers to the disciples who were listening to Jesus, but given the mood of the passage, it might be better to translate it this way: 'I say to you who are still listening to me.'

If we turn these words around, we can understand that there were many people in the place where Jesus is now, who had been healed, or had their spiritual problems solved, or had gone back to their homes after listening to Jesus' teaching. They had all gained something for themselves, and they had gone back to their places.

But there were some who were "still" there, and what Jesus is saying to them is today's text, starting in verse 27. From this point on, Jesus was no longer just talking about 'what is blessedness, what is woe', but he was beginning to outline specific principles of life: 'If you are still here with me, how should you live?'

The first thing mentioned there is 'love your enemies'.

When Mahatma Gandhi, the Indian saint, was studying in England, he met with Christians and studied the Bible. According to his autobiography, he was deeply moved by Jesus' words about "loving your enemies" because, although he was steeped in religion, none of the religions he knew said "love your enemies".

Later, Gandhi would go on to lead India's independence movement, a movement of 'non-violent resistance' whose motto, he confesses, was Jesus' commandment to 'love your enemies'.

But the reverse is also true. In the history of the church, the commandment to 'love your enemies' has certainly been important, but it is also seen by some as an unrealisable religious ideal, something that is only possible for the Son of God, like Jesus, because of our selfish nature.

Among the great figures of the 20th century, I like the Latin American revolutionary Che Guevara. Born into a wealthy family in Argentina, Che Guevara became a doctor, and as a young man in his 20s, he travelled across South America on a motorbike with a friend and saw the miserable lives of poor peasants, labourers, and indigenous people, so he left his comfortable life to become a revolutionary.

His biography records a letter he wrote to his mother in 1956, after he overthrew Cuba's Batista regime through armed struggle. 'I am walking a path that is not at all like Jesus'. I will fight with every weapon in my power, I will not let them crucify me, and I will not do it the way you want me to do it.'

To Guevara, his enemies were the imperialists who had long oppressed Latin America through violence, capital, and culture, along with the corrupt politicians who had been bribed by them.

'Love your enemies' is certainly a commandment of the Lord that we should live by. But when we read it, we must look at the context of the Bible. Jesus' command to love our enemies shouldn't be taken as a blind eye to all the criminals and corruption in the world.

In today's passage, the primary meaning of "enemy" refers to those who despise and curse the people of God. In the first-century church, which received the Gospel of Luke, "enemy" likely referred to the outside world that persecuted the church.

Thus, Jesus' teaching primarily meant: "Even when the church is misunderstood, despised, and persecuted, do not retaliate. Instead, overcome the world with love."

Brothers and sisters, 'loving our enemies' is not possible for us today. So the question facing us is to ask who our 'enemies' are. Who are our 'enemies'? Is it the dark forces that threaten world peace, or is it the 'devil', 'Satan', who is trying to destroy our lives?

I believe that the 'enemy' Jesus is referring to is all the 'others' we have pushed aside as not being with us, because the world has taught us that those who are different from us in society are objects of uncomfortable and intrusive comparison and competition that threaten our daily lives and peace. This has always been the case throughout human history, and it will not change today or in the future.

But in the end, it's just a matter of time. It may seem slow, but eventually Jesus' will to save the whole earth will be fulfilled. And when that day finally comes, we will all be one in Jesus.