

Why We Love Our Enemies

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Lectionary: Genesis 45:3-11, 15, Luke 6:27-38. 1 Corinthians 15:35-38,42-50

Why should we love our enemies?

One of my favorite basketball players comes to mind—Kahwi Leonard, the 6’ 7” with a 7’ 3” wingspan who plays for the LA Clippers.. (Don’t worry I still root for the Celtics.). What I like about Leonard is unusual. It’s not really how he plays, it’s how he runs—how he pursues his opponents with a strange gallop. He’s like "The Hound of Heaven" in Francis Thompson’s poem:

From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.
But with unhurrying chase,
And unperturbèd pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
They beat—and a Voice beat
More instant than the Feet—
‘All things betray thee, who betrayest Me.’

Leonard is unrelentless in his awkward running –his gallop--ever drawing nearer in the chase, with unhurrying and unperturbed pace.

Leonard reminds me of Jesus, slouched toward Bethlehem.

In Jesus’ awkward teachings, such as: Love our enemies, Jesus pursues us with unhurrying chase and unperturbed pace. Many times we don’t want this awkward Jesus. In fact, we become exhausted in our own flight from Him. Jesus, with his deliberate speed and majestic instancy requires us not only to need each other but commands us to love each other, and more irritating—to love our enemies. “Love your enemy” becomes an earworm, a catchy song that gets stuck in our head. Earworms can be a nuisance, but this one is common for us as Christians. “Love your enemy” chases us down with the Voice beat, **“All things betray you, who betray me.”**

The earworm, “Love your enemy” chases us down. It is the singular teaching that breaks through human cultures trapped in a violent world. This earworm leads to Jesus’ **Golden Rule**, the principle of treating others as one would want to be treated by them. It is sometimes called an

ethics of reciprocity, meaning that we should reciprocate how we would like to be treated. Unlike the blatant and irritating command by Jesus to love our enemy, the Golden Rule has a more elegant gate, more like Stephen Curry's cross over dribble that enables his three point shot. The phrase "Golden Rule" was coined in Britain by Anglicans— Charles Gibbon and Thomas Jackson in 1604. The golden rule is about reciprocity which can be found in the tenets of most religions. The Golden rule can be articulated both positively and negatively.

Positively--Treat others as you would like others to treat you

Negatively--Do *not* treat others in ways that you would *not* like to be treated

Semblance of the Golden Rule could also be interpreted in **Judaism**; for example in the Hebrew Bible or the Old Testament book of Leviticus. "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against your kinsfolk. Love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord (*Leviticus 19:18*). Rabbi Hillel the Elder (c. 110 BCE – 10 CE) recognized love as the fundamental principle of Jewish ethics.

Muslim scholar Al-Qurtubi looked at the Golden Rule of loving your neighbor and treating them as you wish to be treated as having universal application to believers and unbelievers alike.

In **Hinduism**, one should never do to another which one regards as injurious to one's own self. By making *dharma* which is harmonious behavior with others your main focus, one cannot help but treat others as you treat yourself.

The **Buddha** (Siddhartha Gautama, c. 623–543 BCE) made the negative formulation of the golden rule one of the cornerstones of his ethics in the 6th century. Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful.

In **Jainism**, the Golden Rule is essential in the prohibition of causing any living beings, even insects to suffer. Jainism forbids inflicting upon others what is harmful to oneself.

So, as much as Jesus chases us with this Golden Rule, we as Christians cannot claim its uniqueness. As much as I would want to see Christianity as controlling the discourse of the Golden Rule, and as proud as I am for Anglicans coining the phrase "Golden Rule"; I'm afraid that Ghandi is right when he said, "I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ." "If it weren't for Christians, I'd be a Christian."

All things betray you, who betray me.

This implies how Jesus chases us to move beyond the tribalistic gods of traditional human culture and politics, to the awkward God of Jesus whom St. Paul insightfully proclaims:

But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. (Romans 5:8-10)

What is unique to Christianity is God executed as a criminal on a Roman cross. What is unique and why we should love our enemies is in how Jesus reveals that the love of enemies heals tribalism, thereby creating one new humanity (Eph. 2:15). And before going to the cross Jesus gives us that earworm: “Love your enemies. . . . Be merciful, just as God is merciful.” In other words, don’t do to others as they do to you, but as you would do to yourself. Of course, such reciprocity assumes a healthy sense of self.

James Breech, in *The Silence of Jesus*, says “Jesus is the most loving and least sentimental man one could imagine.” To Love your enemies is not sentimentality. It is something that goes right to the heart of healing the world. When Jesus says, “...do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you,” simply watch what happens after you do these things. This is a recipe for destroying the little bundle of lies about myself and my society that came into existence the moment my tribe and I found somebody to hate. Following this injunction is not just a nice thing to do. It’s a matter of destroying the whole system of mystification which has been the womb in which we’ve lived and moved and had our being. When we love our enemies, we deconstruct the whole business of violence and the need for scapegoats. Jesus chases us down and makes us recognize the profundity of changing the world.

I love Jesus because with body bent, heaving toward the cross, He knows how to win. The miracle is this: Jesus knows how to win in such a way that no one should lose. Like Kawhi Leonard, Jesus chases after us to discover that our identity and salvation are not just individually determined, but communally determined. After all, Leonard plays on a team. He depends upon the eccentric ways of his teammates. Jesus is on the world’s team, with all of our eccentric ways—teaching us a deeper lesson, that we all are in this life together; and we should help each other to become who we are all meant to be. No one should be left behind, no one’s tragedy or addiction or life trap can be seen only for them alone, but must be seen in light of how the whole world is being saved.