

Loving Our Enemies

Scripture Reading — Matthew 5:38-48

“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven.” — Matthew 5:44-45

My mother was a teenager during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands (1940-45). A girl next door died when a bomb hit her home. A Jewish family with young children across the street were taken away, and they all died in the Holocaust.

At 16, my mother was often sent out on a bike to get milk at a farm outside their city. On one trip, she was stopped by a German soldier at a checkpoint, and she realized she was looking into the eyes of a scared 16-year-old boy forced into service. She said, “When I saw how young and how scared he was, I learned for the first time in my life just a little of what it means to love your enemies.”

Though I have never had to live in those kinds of conditions, I have experienced hating others and wishing them ill, and I’ve struggled with Jesus’ command to love my enemies.

I’ve noticed that when I hate others, I easily feel proud and self-righteous. I find myself thinking, “They have done or said these horrible things, and I would never do that. They are inferior.” I’ve also learned that this kind of attitude undermines all of Jesus’ teaching about loving God and neighbor.

Recognizing the ugliness of my own attitude doesn’t automatically lead me to love my enemies, but it begins to put that sinfulness to death. I begin to realize that I too am sinful and in need of forgiveness.

Prayer

Lord, when any hatred for others lives in me, please forgive me and help me to care about their souls, loving them as you do. Amen.

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