February 20, 2022
Seventh Sunday After Epiphany
Luke 6:27-38
Pastor John Klawiter

Grace and peace to you my brothers and sisters in faith,

Today's readings were about loving your enemy (**SLIDE** of the definition of enemy).

Enemy? Wow, that's a strong word. **A person who feels hatred for, fosters harmful designs against, or engages in antagonistic activities against another; an adversary or opponent.**

I can't say that I hate anyone THAT much… but in the spirit of what Jesus is teaching, what about someone kind of annoying? Someone that you just can't understand why they believe what they do—who doesn't seem to follow reason? Someone who always thinks they're superior to others?

Have I planted a seed—now, can you think of an enemy or two?

No cheating here—you can't just say "nope, I love EVERYBODY"… there's SOMEBODY out there that if I told you that you were gonna drive 5 hours with them and you have to talk, you would cringe.

Jesus says "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you." I think this is the hardest teaching in the Bible. Do you know why?

It's because we know we can't actually do it. There's literally zero chance. We are imperfect. We find faults. We always want to know who's to blame.

If I love my enemy, they'll take advantage of it.

If I do good to those who hate me, they'll wonder why I'm a pushover. Why won't I put up a fight? They'll think I'm weak.

I don't think that is what Jesus meant.

I think Jesus wants us to explore that mindset—that feeling in our heads that dismisses someone or when we think we're above others.

When we feel that way, challenge ourselves to feel empathy. To truly understand why someone feels the way they do.

I know that there are people who perceive the world differently then me. I know that we won't be able to agree. But if I'm loving my neighbor, I have to see their humanity, even if I won't change their mind. At the end of the day, this person still might be my enemy, but in my heart, I have sought love, peace, and been gracious.

The biggest enemy we face is evil. The devil can be found in temptation. Greed. When we do the things we know we shouldn't, but we justify it.

Nobody will know. Nobody will get hurt. Nobody will mind… but what are we doing to ourselves? Are we creating a right relationship with God when we do this?

The last two years have perhaps created more enemies among us, haven't they? People that we once trusted, now… we aren't so sure.

Life has been really weird, hasn't it? What happened? Well, a lot of things challenged us—we were united, and then we weren't, and then we found strains of hope, but then more confusion, frustration, fears…

What if you had to write down what happened the last two years? You were in charge of documenting the last two years of humanity so that generations to follow would know what happened when Covid-19 afflicted the world.

Wow, big responsibility, right???

What would you write about? What would be some of the main bullet points you'd capture in this story?

Masks, vaccines, quarantines, politics, CDC and health care, schools

Do you think you'd also include your opinions, or at least your bias, about whether things were handled appropriately? Do you think you'd speak out about what you perceive as injustices? You would DEFINITELY want the future readers to know how much awful it was, especially because of what other people did or did not do.

I wonder how you'd write about it with a theological lens… what if you wrote this whole story and remembered to include where God has been in all of this?

I'd love to read that story!

Ok, ok, ok… NOW, remember that person I asked you to think of a minute ago? You know, the one that you'd be horrified to get stuck with in a car for 5 hours.

Yeah, that person.

What if… the telling of the story of the last two years was going to be documented by THEM???

You guessed it, they are writing down what's happened in the last two years and every last detail will get saved and generations to come will look back on their writing as the God's honest truth. This is what Covid 19 was like.

Are you ok with that? Is it accurate? Do you trust that they'll get it right?

Why not? They've lived through it, too!?

Did you know that the Torah—the first 5 books of the Old Testament—that we read, which includes stories like Joseph and his brothers, was not written by one person?

In fact, it was written by multiple sources. (

After Joseph reconciles with his brothers, their dad comes to Egypt. Jacob. Also known as Israel. His 12 sons represent the twelve tribes of… Israel.

The story we heard in Genesis is mainly written by two different sources. J and E. J for Jahwist. E for Elohist. YHWH vs Elohim. Two different names for God.

We don't know the persons names that wrote them down, but the writing style is different. There are clearly two different writers who are telling the story of Joseph.

Did you know that they were enemies? The northern and southern kingdoms are not aligned, but they still believe in the same god. They have similar stories… but they definitely tell it differently.

Perfect example, after Jacob learns that Joseph is still alive and everyone is reconciled again, it's almost time for him to die. All of his family gathers around for a blessing… and clarity on the inheritance.

One writer, J, gives the birthright to Judah, even though he's the 4th born, he will be the leader… in

Genesis 49, "your father's sons shall bow down before you."

Yet, in Genesis 48, the birthright is handed out by E—and it goes to Joseph's son, Ephraim. Years later, Ephraim would become another name for the kingdom of Israel.

What is happening in all of this time frame? The Israelites were united, but then the kingdom split. Then, the Babylonians conquer them and they go into **exile** (SLIDE pop in EXILE).

Different authors emerged from EACH side of the split. Also, D, as in Deuteronomy, and P, the Priestly writer, are produced.

Guess what, do you think that each writer saw history the same way? Nope. Do you think that each writer wanted to make sure that their side of history was told favorably? You bet they did.

Eventually, choices needed to be made. Whose story would win? What source do we read when we read the Bible?

That's the question that inspired a group of about twenty of us to learn more about how the Bible was put together.

The last three weeks, we've gathered to talk about the book "Who wrote the Bible?" (IMAGE of book study)

We are meeting again this Friday to talk about the conclusion.

No spoilers—but here's a little hint about what happened.

An editor made the final say on how this all got put together. Instead of throwing out the parts he didn't like, the editor kept it all (**SLIDE of Pentateuch**).

He combined it. And added to it. Even when the stories contradicted each other. By sewing it all together, this editor honored the traditions before him and the Pentateuch, the first five books of the

Bible, as we know it, were created. Still divinely inspired. Still a story of God and humanity.

Why did he do it?

Friedman wrote (SLIDE of quote) *"It is in the context of a divided kingdom of Israel and Judah that we find two writers who fashioned two versions of their people's story, J and E. Each version was intimately associated with the life of the community from which it came. It is in the context of the all and the reunion of the divided peoples that we find someone uniting the two, forging a single story that might serve the reunited community."*

There is not one universal story about what we have been through as a people in the last two years. Some have suffered, some have thrived, some have done both.

What is universal is that God is with us—you and me, with the anti-maskers and the maskers, the vaxxed and the anti-vaxxed, the "personal freedom" and the we're "all in this together" crowds.

We are to love ALL of those neighbors. All of these threads are the story. God has knit us together, time and time again.

The stories are still being written… if we're choosing love, no matter the outcome, we've chosen the right side. Amen.