

So David and Abishai went to the army by night, and there was Saul, lying asleep inside the camp with his spear stuck in the ground near his head. Abner and the soldiers were lying around him.

⁸ *Abishai said to David, "Today God has delivered your enemy into your hands. Now let me pin him to the ground with one thrust of my spear; I won't strike him twice."*

⁹ *But David said to Abishai, "Don't destroy him! Who can lay a hand on the LORD's anointed and be guiltless?" ¹⁰ As surely as the LORD lives," he said, "the LORD himself will strike him; either his time will come and he will die, or he will go into battle and perish. ¹¹ But the LORD forbid that I should lay a hand on the LORD's anointed. Now get the spear and water jug that are near his head, and let's go."*

¹² *So David took the spear and water jug near Saul's head, and they left. No one saw or knew about it, nor did anyone wake up. They were all sleeping, because the LORD had put them into a deep sleep.*

¹³ *Then David crossed over to the other side and stood on top of the hill some distance away; there was a wide space between them. ¹⁴ He called out to the army and to Abner son of Ner, "Aren't you going to answer me, Abner?"*

Abner replied, "Who are you who calls to the king?"

¹⁵ *David said, "You're a man, aren't you? And who is like you in Israel? Why didn't you guard your lord the king? Someone came to destroy your lord the king. ¹⁶ What you have done is not good. As surely as the LORD lives, you and your men deserve to die, because you did not guard your master, the LORD's anointed. Look around you. Where are the king's spear and water jug that were near his head?"*

¹⁷ *Saul recognized David's voice and said, "Is that your voice, David my son?"*

David replied, "Yes it is, my lord the king." ¹⁸ And he added, "Why is my lord pursuing his servant? What have I done, and what wrong am I guilty of? ¹⁹ Now let my lord the king listen to his servant's words. If the LORD has incited you against me, then may he accept an offering. If, however, men have done it, may they be cursed before the LORD! They have now driven me from my share in the LORD's inheritance and have said, 'Go, serve other gods.' ²⁰ Now do not let my blood fall to the ground far from the presence of the LORD. The king of Israel has come out to look for a flea—as one hunts a partridge in the mountains."

²¹ *Then Saul said, "I have sinned. Come back, David my son. Because you considered my life precious today, I will not try to harm you again. Surely I have acted like a fool and have erred greatly."*

²² *"Here is the king's spear," David answered. "Let one of your young men come over and get it. ²³ The LORD rewards every man for his righteousness and faithfulness. The LORD delivered you into my hands today, but I would not lay a hand on the LORD's anointed. ²⁴ As surely as I valued your life today, so may the LORD value my life and deliver me from all trouble."*

²⁵ *Then Saul said to David, "May you be blessed, my son David; you will do great things and surely triumph."*

So David went on his way, and Saul returned home. (1 Samuel 26:7-25)

How Can I Love My Enemies?

"Love your enemies." That may be the hardest thing that Jesus ever said. How am I supposed to do that -- especially when there's a reason why someone is my enemy? They've lied about me. They've hurt me or my family. They've cost me jobs or opportunities or friends. Jesus seems to be commanding the impossible. And in a sense, here in this sinful world, he is. Just because God commands something doesn't mean that we sinners can actually do it. But in our Old Testament lesson for today, we see the principle that Jesus was talking about put into practice. And by examining what David did and why, we can perhaps begin to understand what God commands us to do and how we are supposed to get it done. **How can I love my enemies?**

I.

How is it possible? Loving our enemies runs counter to all that we are by nature. Even if we want to do it, where does the power come from? David shows us. **How can I love my enemies? By trusting in God's love for me.**

God's love did the impossible for us. And it does the impossible in us. This event took place near the end of King Saul's reign. David had begun his career in public service by killing Goliath and he went on to be

one of Saul's most successful military commanders. But Saul was always very nervous about David. He understood that David was God's choice to replace him and his dynasty. So as David's reputation grew, Saul's hatred grew. After several attempts to kill him, David finally ran away. But Saul kept hunting for him. In this incident, Saul and his best troops were in the field hunting for David. During the night, David and a man named Abishai snuck into the camp and made it all the way up to King Saul who was sleeping in the middle of the camp surrounded by his soldiers and guarded by his most trusted warrior, Abner. How did they manage to get all way to Saul? Didn't he post guards? Of course he did. But God caused a deep sleep to fall over the entire army. God delivered Saul into David's hands. What would David do?

Well, Abishai knew what *he* wanted to do – kill Saul. But David said, **“Don't destroy him! Who can lay a hand on the LORD's anointed and be guiltless?”** In the Old Testament, God anointed certain kinds of people to show that he had chosen them to serve him. So in the Old Testament, the king of Israel was as much a religious figure as he was a civil figure. He was a public minister, just like the priests and the prophets were. David rightly saw an attack on Saul as an attack on God's chosen servant.

That shows his faith. The Hebrew for the LORD's Anointed is really the LORD's Messiah. The office of king of Israel was a kind of living prophecy about the one true King of God's true people. The work the king did fighting the enemies of the people and ruling them taught about Jesus fighting our battle against sin, death and the devil and ruling over us both now and forever. When David refused to harm the LORD's Anointed he was demonstrating the depths of his faith in God's promise to send a Savior. Now, I realize that there is no specific mention in this text of the coming Messiah. But David is the author of Psalm 8 where God led him to depict a conversation between the Father and the Son, of Psalm 16 where he foresaw the death and resurrection of Christ, of Psalm 22 where he described in amazing detail the crucifixion of the Savior and of Psalm 23, “the LORD is my shepherd,” where he echoed Jesus' own claim to be the Good Shepherd a thousand years before our Lord made it. David knew and trusted in a Savior who would not be born for a thousand years. A Savior who would live and die and rise for him.

And he would take David's sins away. Knowing that is the heart of faith in Christ, in both the Old and the New Testament. That faith is the key to loving our enemies. When we know that we're sinners ourselves, we're much more able to forgive, because we know that we deserve God's punishment but God has forgiven us. Think about your enemies. What have they done to hurt you? What have they done that you can't let go of? Now look at yourself. What have you done that God has let go of? What was your worst sin ever? What is the sin that you commit over and over again? How should God deal with you? The truth is, he should send you and me to hell for those sins. Yet, that's not what he did. He sent the Savior, the Messiah that David only knew by prophecy. He sent Jesus to die and pay for all those horrible sins that we are guilty of. He sent Jesus to wash us clean in a flood of his blood. God has forgiven us. And God has forgiven the people who hurt us. Jesus died for them, too. He calls us to forgive. When he announces his love and his forgiveness to us, he works in our hearts to build our faith so that we can do just that.

David had that faith and he loved Saul, his greatest enemy. He trusted in the rest of God's promise, too, and this story really brings out how that faith changed the way he dealt with his enemy. Abishai wanted to pin Saul to the ground. He argued, **“God has delivered your enemy into your hands.”** But David would not attack God's representative. He trusted that God would take care of Saul. His time would come and he would die or he'd be killed in battle, but it was in God's hands. Notice, David didn't pretend like Saul was innocent. He knew Saul was trying to kill him. But he trusted in God to know how to bring about justice. At the end of the story, David didn't know how much longer he was going to have to live in fear for his life. But he walked away trusting that God knew what was best for him, even though all that was happening to him at that moment was unfair.

That trust leads us to love our enemies, too. So often, when we want revenge, the motive is pride. When we want vindication, it's all about the fact that nobody gets to talk to me like that. Nobody gets to do that to me. When we keep repeating, “Me! Me! Me!” we forget all about God. But when people hurt us, when life is unfair to us, that's when we need to remember God's love and promises. God calls us to trust that in the end, he will put everything right – even if that means that he will forgive the people who hurt us because they repent. God calls us to trust that he will love us and care for us every day of our lives. God calls us to repent of the sin of pride and trust that Jesus took even that sin away and God has forgiven us. God works in our hearts through

the message of Jesus' love to give us the ability to forgive and to love even those who deserve it least. Love your enemies.

II.

But what does it mean to love your enemy? I think that all too often when we think of the word "love" we picture a Walt Disney "true love conquers all" kind of thing. We think of a warm feeling. Now, it can be a different kind of warm feeling – the love we feel for our spouse or our children or friends is not the same emotion. But it is a warm feeling. I can't make myself feel something that I don't. How can Jesus command us to have a warm feeling for our enemies? Well, the truth is, he doesn't. David shows us what love is. **How can I love my enemies? By doing what is best for them.**

David's feelings about Saul had to be pretty complicated. He had risked his life again and again for Saul. His best friend was Saul's son and his first wife was Saul's daughter. Then Saul had turned on him. Twice he tried to kill him with a spear. He sent men to his house to kill him in his bed. He slaughtered the priests at the tabernacle because they had given him food. David wouldn't have been human if he hadn't felt angry and betrayed and hurt by Saul's attacks.

But David didn't base his conduct toward the king on his feelings. He based it on his faith. So he did what was best for Saul. Abishai wanted to kill Saul. Understand, this was the second time that David had the chance to kill him. He had refused to do it the first time, so this time, Abishai offered to do for him. And if David had been a politician, he could've let Abishai do it and then claimed that he didn't do anything personally to harm the LORD's anointed. But David knew better than that. He stopped his loyal friend from harming a man who was trying to kill him.

I wonder how many of us would do the same? In this age of "stand your ground" laws and concealed weapons permits justified in the name of self-defense, how many of us would take Jesus' teaching to turn the other cheek as far as David did? But that wasn't even the end of it. David and Abishai took Saul's spear and water bottle and then when they had put a safe distance between them, David called out and told Abner, the man the king trusted, that he had failed to protect the king. But David, the man the king feared, had kept him safe. Of course, David wanted Saul to hear the message. Why? He wanted him to see the injustice of his actions and repent. He wanted him to turn from his sin and find forgiveness in Christ.

And he succeeded at least to a degree. Saul admitted that he had sinned and that he had acted like a fool. He invited David to come home – but there had been too much hurt for David to trust him yet. Saul himself ended his paranoid pursuit and went home. Not long after this, he died in battle. But before he left, Saul at last seemed to accept that David was God's chosen king and he would triumph. Now, it's hard to know what the state of Saul's heart was when he died. He seems to have been in despair and it's possible that he never trusted in his Savior to take his sins away. But David did everything he could to lead him to repent.

That is an important lesson for us, too. Love in the biblical sense is doing what is best for someone else. St. Paul says that love always protects. That's what David did. He says that love always hopes and always perseveres. When it comes to our enemies, God doesn't command us to paint smiles on our faces and feel things that we don't feel. God commands us to act as Jesus would've acted – to do what is best for our enemy, even to protect him from harm. And to call him to repent, because the worst thing that can happen to anyone is to die in unbelief. I can't make someone turn from their sin. Only God has that power. But I can do what David did. I can strive to make them reflect on their life and be ready with the gospel of peace and forgiveness when they recognize that they have done wrong.

Are we ready to do that? Clearly, on our own, none of us is. It takes the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome the pride in our hearts that thinks that people who hurt me should get what they have coming. But we have that power of the Holy Spirit. It's called the gospel. Jesus died and paid for our sinful, prideful, self-centered hearts. He rose and forgave us. He came into our hearts through the waters of holy baptism. He still comes through the gospel that we have heard all our lives and through the body and blood of Christ given to us in holy communion. He has made us new and he constantly works in us to strengthen the believer inside us so that we live as he calls us to live. By his power, we can show even our enemies the love of Christ. And when we call them to repent, we have God's promise that the Holy Spirit will work through the law and the gospel. When we show Christ-like love to our enemies, we have Christ's promise that we will heap coals of fire on their heads – just like David did to Saul, and God will use that to strike their hearts. Trusting in those promises, let us love our enemies.

Love is the heart of the Christian life. Love is doing what Jesus did – sacrificing ourselves for the good of those we love because we trust in our Savior God. While it may be the hardest thing Jesus ever said, no love is closer to what Jesus did for us than loving our enemies. We have the power of God to do that in his message of forgiveness. We have the model of Christ to do that in his love for us. My friends, love your enemies. Amen.