

## LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

5 As King David approached Bahurim [THAT IS, A VILLAGE ON THE EAST SIDE OF THE MOUNT OF OLIVES], a man from the same clan as Saul's family came out from there. His name was Shimei son of Gera, and he cursed as he came out. 6 He pelted David and all the king's officials with stones, though all the troops and the special guard were on David's right and left. 7 As he cursed, Shimei said, "Get out, get out, you murderer, you scoundrel! 8 The LORD has repaid you for all the blood you shed in the household of Saul, in whose place you have reigned. The LORD has given the kingdom into the hands of your son Absalom. You have come to ruin because you are a murderer!"

9 Then Abishai son of Zeruiah said to the king, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over and cut off his head."

10 But the king said, "What does this have to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? If he is cursing because the LORD said to him, 'Curse David,' who can ask, 'Why do you do this?'"

11 David then said to Abishai and all his officials, "My son, my own flesh and blood, is trying to kill me. How much more, then, this Benjamite! Leave him alone; let him curse, for the LORD has told him to. 12 It may be that the LORD will look upon my misery and restore to me his covenant blessing instead of his curse today."

13 So David and his men continued along the road while Shimei was going along the hillside opposite him, cursing as he went and throwing stones at him and showering him with dirt. 14 The king and all the people with him arrived at their destination exhausted. And there he refreshed himself.

David's forty-year reign as King of Israel might be divided into about four pieces. First, his rule in Hebron. Second: his early years in Jerusalem ending with his adultery with Bathsheba. Third: His middle years in Jerusalem ending in our text today with Absalom's rebellion. Fourth: His late years in Jerusalem culminating with his son Adonijah's rebellion and David finally naming his son Solomon as heir. David died in about 970 BC.

About ten years before the events of our text, David's son Amnon had violated his half-sister Tamar. Her full brother, David's son Absalom, had bided his time, and then seized an opportunity to kill Amnon to avenge his sister's disgrace. Then he ran away to his grandfather's estate for a few years, and when he came back, he was permitted by David to move to Hebron, far to the south of Jerusalem, which had been David's first palace, to rule there as prince. But Absalom was not content to only be a prince, and he began to rule and act as if he were king. Now Absalom was marching on Jerusalem with hundreds of warriors, and David knew that with his main army away fighting another enemy, he could not withstand his son's attack. So David had to flee.

This brings us to this event on the slope of the Mount of Olives with this strange, bitter, hateful man, Shimei, pelting David with rocks and clods of dirt and cursing the king: You had this

coming! Your son has taken away your crown because of all the blood you spilled in King Saul's family!

Well, had David mistreated King Saul or his family? Hadn't David kept his warriors from even laying a hand on King Saul because he was the Lord's anointed? Wasn't Saul's son Jonathan David's best friend? Didn't David do everything in his power to establish Saul's reign and Israel's borders as Saul's best general and field commander? Yet Saul had been filled with jealousy and hatred for David, and as we can see in this distant relative, Shimei, Saul's hatred spread out throughout the family.

The Fifth Commandment teaches us to love our neighbor. Perhaps the most difficult side of this commandment is to love, not only our neighbor, but our enemies. God doesn't make a distinction in the commandment: Oh, but if they hate you or attack you, it's okay to hate them back. Not at all: He tell us to love. Think about Jesus talking with his enemies, and even the way he treated the soldiers who came to arrest him. He let them know what they were up against, but he didn't lash out with violence or even with accusations against them. He simply showed them his divine power. We don't have his divine power to wield—or do we? We have his powerful word.

Listen to the way David handled being cursed and stoned by his enemy. He assumed that the Lord himself had ordered those curses. If that was the case, who was David to stop it? Think of how high a regard David had for God's holy word, even when that holy word might have been proclaiming judgment on him. If it's the word of God, what can we say against it? Why would we ever speak against it? The word of God must stand, always, and forever.

The word of God lets us respond to our enemies, not only with its permission to respond, but providing the very words with which we can respond. The Bible proclaims the two great doctrines of God: Law and Gospel. If you've never spoken about your faith with anyone outside our Lutheran fellowship then you may not be aware that very few Christians in the world and virtually no unbelievers understand the difference between Law and Gospel.

And perhaps you yourself are a little rusty or fuzzy on this difference. The Law of God shows us our sins. The Law proclaims God's will, for example, in the Ten Commandments or in the Sermon on the Mount, and that Law makes us feel bad—or it should—because we don't live up to its perfect standard. The Law is what makes some people want to stay away from church because it brings them down.

But the Law isn't the Bible's only teaching, and the Law is certainly not the only thing we preach in our preaching. The other great teaching of the Bible is the Gospel. The Gospel shows us our Savior—but not as a Judge who is angry about our sins. The Gospel, the Good News, is that our Lord Jesus Christ has taken away the guilt of all our sins with his own blood. The Gospel tells us that we are forgiven, and the Gospel invites us to live lives of joy and thanks and faith in Jesus who saved us.

Here in the historical account of David being cursed by Shimei, the Law stabs at our hearts because we would not have acted the way David did. Think of someone who doesn't like you. You may have sinned against that person more in your mind with your thoughts or with your lips in the things you have said or with your fingertips with the things you have written or posted more than anything you have physically done against that person.

Those sins of the mind and those sins of our words are sins to be confessed and a way of life that needs to be changed. Turn away from it right now.

Why? Because we pass along those sinful thoughts to our children and to the people around us. I don't mean that our children will spiral off into a vendetta against everybody who irritates you, but they will follow the pattern of how you and I talk about people we don't like, and about people who don't like us.

So Jesus invites us to repent, to make a change, to ask for forgiveness and to ask his help in turning to a different way of thinking about our enemies, even when they speak out against us and sling mud at us like Shimei throwing rocks and dirt over and over again at David all along the road. Maybe someone is sending out messages or emails about you. Maybe someone is parked outside your house with a sign telling the world what a sinner you are.

Ask God for strength, the courage of King David, to respond with silence or to respond with the Gospel.

Ask the Lord to open a door for his word to work in your enemy's heart, not only to end their enmity against you, but to rescue them from the jaws of sin and unbelief, and to win them for heaven. In our Gospel Lesson, Jesus talks about the overwhelming reward of heaven as "a good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, poured into your lap" (Lk. 6:38). The measure isn't just wheat, you know. It's joy running over, love running over, reunion with loved ones poured into your lap, and blessings, eternal blessings, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, forever.

Share your love of Jesus with the people that you love, and ask God's help as you strive even to love your enemies. Amen.