

Monday

Read Matthew 5:43-48

Perhaps hate seemed too strong a word for you in the sermon. Certainly, people in 2022 debate about what constitutes hate and what does not. And yet the status of our hearts betrays us and Jesus knows it. It could be very possible that none of his original hearers thought that they were people who hated anyone. After all, we tend to think that we are doing what we are supposed to be doing and since hate is negative and we don't want to be thought in the wrong, we justify our thoughts, words, and actions in all kinds of different ways.

At our core, however, Jesus knows that we have hate. At the very minimum, we are cursed with the condition of hating the ways of God. This is why we need Jesus to reconcile us with God. We are constitutively rebellious against the ways of God and that rebellion is not born of love for God, but love of self and, as God defines it in scripture, hatred for God's ways.

Start working hard to rid yourself of hate (and don't pretend it isn't there). Pray. Pray more. Read scripture. Change how you speak about people and to people. Change how you act. I think a lot of us are going to be surprised and quite sad when Jesus asks us about our life and we respond with a laundry list of "right things we believe" and find out how disappointed Jesus is that we didn't actually love and care for people. Jesus cares little for our dead, laundry-list faith that didn't act on his message of love.

Each day this week our challenge is to perform one deliberate, out of the ordinary, act of love. What will you do today?

Tuesday

Read Leviticus 19:33-34, Exodus 23:4-5, and Psalm 139:19-22

In these two passages (and many others), God commands his people to care for foreigners and enemies. Yet, in Jesus' time, very religiously knowledgeable people found all kinds of ways to define the concern of "love your neighbor" very narrowly so that they could hate and despise all kinds of people. How do you think they made that move? Maybe they had Psalm 139 and passages like it in mind. I think passages like Psalm 139:19-22 are more of brutally honest cries from the depths of the heart, not prescriptions for how to live. They are recognitions that this world is broken and that we sometimes suffer because of that brokenness. Jesus is well-acquainted with the brokenness of the world and yet continually teaches that we should love our neighbor and that our neighbor is everyone. It is OK to be occasionally overcome by hostility in your heart, but Jesus wants you to give that to him, not act on it towards your neighbor.

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Wednesday

Read Ephesians 5:4

When someone says something hateful, or just bad, say something. Be polite but don't let poor, demeaning talk go unchecked. Staying silent in the face of such talk does not help squelch it, but silently endorses such behavior. Show love for your neighbor who isn't in the room by standing up for the love of Jesus on their behalf.

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Thursday

Read Matthew 13:24-30

Why would the farmer want to wait to pull the weeds – why not pull them immediately? A little botanical background will help us understand this parable more clearly. The weeds that the enemy came and planted might very well have been darnel, a weedy rye grass with poisonous black seeds. Darnel resembles wheat in its early growth but is easily distinguished from wheat when it is full grown. Therefore, it is safer for the crops to get rid of the weed later.

Jesus' followers will always live beside people who do not follow Jesus. Pulling them out of the ground, hating them, or excluding them is not our job (these are all forms of saving/damning judgment that Jesus reserves for himself). At the harvest, Jesus will deal with the wheat and the weeds according to his word.

We need to remember that the person who we perceive as Jesus' enemy today might be Jesus' greatest disciple tomorrow. How will Jesus view us if we spend our time judging or hating instead of reaching out with love and enduring the weeds for Jesus' sake?

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Friday

Each week in 2022, we are praying for the most dangerous places to be a follower of Jesus. Please spend today in prayer for Oman and the Christians in Oman. You can get more info, and this info comes from, here: <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/>

What is life like for Christians in Oman?

All Omani citizens are assumed to be Muslim. Islam is the state religion, so the level of persecution for Christians in Oman depends on if they are migrant workers or Omani. Local converts from Islam are under the most pressure—their families and communities press them to return to Islam. Converts can be expelled from their families and lose their jobs and children. The government largely tolerates foreign Christian communities, but greatly restricts and monitors their gatherings.

Areas for prayer:

- In the Arabian Peninsula, fear is a barrier to the growth of Christ's Church. Please pray this bondage of fear will be broken.
- Many believers who convert from Islam live in secret and isolation from other followers of Jesus. Ask God to bring these isolated secret believers into fellowship with other believers.
- Pray for whole families to come to the saving grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

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