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Sept. 29th 2024

Scripture: Matthew 5: 43-48

Sermon: Love Your Enemy

Prayer...

Introduction:

This morning we continue our sermon series on love. We focus today on one of the most powerful teachings from Jesus. Jesus commanded his followers to love their enemies. I want to do a few things in my message today. I want to reflect on Jesus' circumstances as an oppressed and marginalized person. I want to then help us understand that Jesus himself identifies with any person and people group that feels oppressed. Finally I would like to remind us of two real examples of how oppressed people have modeled love, while calling all of us to make a difference in the area of peace, reconciliation, and justice.

Jesus grew up as a Jew in Nazareth and traveled around the region of Galilee. He lived within his Jewish community, but the Roman Empire occupied the land. Jews were oppressed by the Romans and there were also Jewish laws in the days of Jesus that he sought to reform, particularly those that led to mistreatment of women. Jesus identified during his time on earth with an oppressed group of Jewish people. Most scholars believe his skin color was brown and his hair curly. He looked like a Middle Eastern person. He was not white or European. When I was nine years old I remember watching the movie Jesus of Nazareth on television. In the early part of the story, Jesus is depicted as a blue eyed blond haired boy. I remember watching him and thinking I look just like that kid.

Seeing Jesus as a young white boy felt nice to me personally as a kid and my presbyterian church that I went to in Spokane at the time also depicted Jesus as white. Again, this felt comforting to me at the time. I really did not know any better. Now, I realize that our white

images of Jesus show minimally our lack of education of what Jewish people looked like in the days of Jesus and if I am honest what it also shows is that many of our churches have favored white images of Jesus because of our racist history.

I personally prefer images of Jesus today where his skin is brown or black because those images also show that Jesus identifies with brown and black people today who continue to feel oppressed because of the color of their skin and possibly their ethnic heritage.

As a white man, I have to admit that overall I have experienced very little oppression in my life. I do not have very many enemies. I could conjure up some experiences in my life where I felt some level of struggle, but really if I am honest I have never felt seriously oppressed for my faith or because of my gender or because of the color of my skin. In some ways, it is not hard for me to teach love your enemies because I don't have too many.

But when Jesus teaches love your enemy, he is a member of an oppressed group of people, so his words are quite convicting.

During this last week, I had the opportunity to watch a documentary about a friend of mine named Bill Pannell. The documentary is called The Gospel According to Bill Pannell. It is the story of his life.

Bill identifies himself as a member of the black evangelical movement. He came to faith in his teen years and after Bible School he began to serve in evangelistic ministries. He would lead music and sometimes preach. In the 1960's, Bill served on a team of Black Evangelical leaders called Tom Skinner Associates. In the 1970's Bill came to Fuller Seminary and started Fuller's African American Studies program, which is now named in his honor as the William E. Pannell Center for Black Church Studies.

I became friends with Bill during my years as a student and staff member at Fuller Seminary. Bill is one of those guys who befriends

everyone he meets. He often spoke at the chapel program I led on campus and we met a couple times for coffee and conversation.

Bill wrote a book in 1968 called *My Friend the Enemy* where he explained his journey with white evangelical leadership who struggled to acknowledge the realities of racism in society. In the documentary I watched this last week, Bill read a quote from his book where he explained that white people sometimes challenge black people to love their enemies. Pannell explained that though this might be theologically true that we all need to love our enemies that is ethically wrong to push that on the oppressed. Here is part of the quote.

“What right does the oppressor have to demand that his victim be saved from sin. You may be scripturally and evangelistically correct, but you are ethically wrong. You have the right message, but your timing is off. You have forfeited the right to be heard. I would say, ‘Physician, heal thyself.’”

I think what Bill continues to teach me is to acknowledge my sin and the sin of predominantly white churches and then to not only repent, but also to do actions of peace, reconciliation, reparation, and love.

Today, we are remembering a specific area where Christians, including the Presbyterian Church of the United States and Canada need to repent. This is the sad history of residential schools for Native American children and youth. We wear an orange shirt today as a form of solidarity and repentance.

I did a little more research today on Native American residential schools. What I learned is that various denominations including Presbyterians actively supported residential schools and contributed to harming Native people through them. The closest school to us is near Salem. It is called Chemawa Native School. I want to read now from an article out of the Oregon Encyclopedia that shares some details on why we are concerned about the history of residential schools. I quote...

“In May 2021, the discovery of unmarked graves at residential schools in Canada sparked media interest and public questions about the history of Indian boarding schools in the United States and Alaska. Recent studies on the impact of these schools reveal a complex and tragic past. While some children thrived, others barely survived. Many, as evidenced by cemeteries at nearly all the schools, died. Survivors of these institutions and their descendants now confront a history of abuse and neglect. In June 2021, Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland announced the Federal Indian Boarding School initiative to “address the inter-generational impact of Indian boarding schools to shed light on the unspoken traumas of the past.” A primary goal is to locate and identify all such facilities and burial sites and to determine the “identities and Tribal affiliations at such locations.”

Chemawa is not exempt from this legacy. No longer used for student burials after 1940, the Chemawa cemetery was razed in 1960, and the grave markers were replaced based on a map kept at the school. Some markers were lost, and teachers, staff, students, and local tribes have held many ceremonies of remembrance for the children buried there. Individual student files have been kept at the National Archives and Records Administration in Seattle. In the early 1990s, the Willamette Valley Genealogical Society compiled a list of the burials and death certificates of Chemawa students. Chemawa historian and researcher SuAnn Reddick and Pacific University Archivist Eva Guggemos compiled and cross-checked enrollment records and individual files with the cemetery map and compiled a list of all the known deaths and burials at the school since 1880. On October 11, 2021, Indigenous Peoples Day, Pacific University in Forest Grove published “Deaths at Chemawa Indian School,” featuring the cemetery spreadsheet.”

So friends this article helps us understand the painful history of Native American Residential Schools throughout the United States and Canada. One is in our backyard.

So what do we do with our history of racism and oppression in Oregon directed towards Native people, and other black and brown people in North America, and really throughout the world. What we must not do is forget the true history? We need to stay educated about the painful stories of those who are oppressed.

Beyond education, we need to offer up prayers of repentance and prayers for God's grace, peace, and justice for oppressed people.

Finally, we need to work for justice by providing reparations, celebrations, and partnerships that bring solidarity and empowerment to people who both have a history of oppression and experience oppression today. Reparation may involved giving land and resources back to Native people. The Cascades Presbytery that our church is a member of recently gave the church property of the

former Laurelhurst Presbyterian Church to a Native American organization called Futures Generation Collaborative and they are providing affordable housing and other wellness service to Native people in the Portland area. The affordable housing project is called Barbie's Village and the goal is to provide tiny homes to houseless Native American people.

In addition to land back reparations, we should go to Pow Wows to enjoy and learn about Native American culture. We should host ceremonies that honor Native people. We plan to do that hopefully in the Spring when we celebrate our Newberg Peace Garden.

The main idea is that we are called to love everyone and to make friends with those who we may not know. Many oppressed people have shown love to their enemies. Those of us who represent groups that have oppressed are invited to join in solidarity with others in need and to not fall into any form of prejudice.

The kingdom of God that Jesus proclaims invites us to a world where we love everyone. Where through actions of prayer, justice, and compassion even so called enemies become friends. This requires humility especially for those of us who have participated in oppression of some kind. It is possible to heal wounds of oppression through grace, repentance, and actions that call forth real change. We are a journey together to demonstrate real love in our world.

With that Spirit in our hearts, let us hear now a prayer for Orange Shirt day. I

Vibrant God

Your creation explodes with the colours of the rainbow

Your peoples reveal the beauty of diversity

We remember today when the joy and dignity of a precious child was destroyed.

We lament today for the childhoods lost through the residential school system.

We mourn for the spirits crushed and the futures compromised.

Celebrate the hope and joy of every child

Tell the stories of resistance that make us stronger

Build the bonds of solidarity to ensure “never again”

In the name of the one who was a child among us

Amen.

Love for Enemies

43 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ 44 But I say to you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be children of your Father in heaven, for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the gentiles do the same? 48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.