

**February 19, 2017**

**Crossing Borders**

*Leviticus 19:1-2, 9-18; Psalm 119:33-40*  
*1 Corinthians 3:10-11, 16-23; Matthew 5:38-48*

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Fellow Ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ,  
Gracia y paz de dios del Padre, Hijo, y Espiritu Santo  
Grace to you and peace from God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

"You have heard that it was said,  
'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'  
But I say to you, 'Do not resist an evildoer.  
But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also;  
and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well,  
and if anyone forces you to go on mile, go also the second mile"

I have been thinking a lot about barriers and borders these last couple of weeks. My husband, Carl and I are in the middle of a sudden and life-changing transition together. Carl's ability to walk failed him three weeks ago. The medical team discovered a mass on his upper spine that was compressing his spinal column. They removed the cancerous mass and he is slowly regaining his mobility. He is able to walk, with the aid of a walker. A barrier we never imagined.

The edge of the bathtub has become an almost insurmountable wall. The border between carpet and hardwood creates a barrier between rooms.

The only path to overcoming these barriers, walls and borders is to resist them. To resist the temptation to just stay put, safely on this side, not to step across them for fear of injury. Or to resist the words of caution given by the physical therapists and the wife.

Christians around the world are reading Jesus' 'Sermon on the Mount' this month. We have learned what it means to be blessed and who it is that is blessed. We have learned what it means to be salty and bright in the world. And we have learned what it means to live in relationship, even after painful family breakups.

Today we focus on love for our enemies. We turn our attention to the meaning of "turn the other cheek". This idea of turning the other cheek is often thought of by society-at-large as wimpy passivity. Even many Christians view it as passive and sheepish.

Not true. "Turning the other cheek" is, in fact powerful resistance against abusive political and economic barriers, boundaries and walls that would keep people separated and segregated. How is this possible? How will the powerful and privileged receive our message of justice and love when we stand quietly and take blow after blow for the sake of the poor, the disenfranchised and the vulnerable among us?

Well, there is power in peaceful, calm resistance. When we resist corrupt and evil regimes we reveal God's holiness. God's holiness is our only hope for justice, mercy and righteousness.

In today's texts, the writer of Leviticus, the Psalmist and the Apostle Paul lead us to a clearer understanding of the holiness that is God's gift to us through the law. To resist laws that would oppress and punish, to push against barriers, walls and borders is decidedly Christian.

God calls Israelites to be holy, for, God says, "I the Lord your God am holy". God calls the church, you and me, to be holy, for, God says, "I the Lord your God am holy". We are God's people. As God's people we practice welcome, hospitality and compassion. God's people do not erect walls.

Turning the other cheek resistance means giving to everyone who begs from you; lending to whoever asks you; going the second mile for your neighbor; and if your neighbor demands your sweater, give them your coat, also.

When we see injustice or abuse of power, we, as Christians are called by God to speak the truth to power. We say it out loud, "that's not right". It is not always the popular stand to take.

We do not approach power with violence, but with the other cheek turned in strength and humility,

We often speak of prophets. Prophets like Moses, Jeremiah, Micah, Malachi John the Baptizer. Men and women who have stood up to power and exposed the sins of racism and sexism, indifference to environmental stewardship, xenophobia and a host of other sins against one another. We are to be the prophets to the Empire world-wide.

It is easy to be gracious and kind to people who look like us. It is comfortable to love the people who love us. It is natural to greet our brothers and sisters whom we know.

Lutheran Seminary Program in the Southwest is a satellite Wartburg Seminary and Lutheran School of Theology. Each January, Executive Director Dr. Jay Alanis takes a group of seminary students to the border towns of Texas/Mexico. I had the privilege to join that Encuentro five years ago.

Iglesia de luterano Agua Viva (Lutheran Church of the Living Water) Is in EL Cenizo near Laredo, Texas. The church sits about 2 blocks from the cliff that rises above the Rio Grande River, a stream, really at that point. A blue meandering river is painted down the center aisle of the cement floor. It leads to a stain glass image of the river above the altar. When they shared the peace during worship, folks go back and forth across the aisle, crossing that painted river. It is the church's way of affirming the gospel truth – we share one baptismal identity as children of the same Holy One of Leviticus and Psalm 119. We are the living stones built on the foundation of Jesus Christ. It doesn't matter which side of the river you stand on, it is bold resistance, it is turning the other cheek to walk in solidarity with our brothers and sisters on the other side of the barrier, the wall, the borders that power, privilege and Empire would erect to separate us. It is these acts of solidarity that break the bonds of separation and injustice.

Sharing la paz with our friends is easy. Sharing la paz with our enemies is a creative, surprising and sometimes risky pattern of interacting across borders, over walls and against barriers. This is what it means to love our neighbor and to welcome the stranger. This is what it means to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect.

We are led to believe that perfection is impossible. Or is it?

We are not talking about moral flawlessness. Instead, we are speaking of a perfect completion of God's holy laws. The perfect completeness that is the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Our holiness is complete in Jesus, the perfection of the law. The law that falls like rain on the just and the unjust, on the good and the evil.

Because of Jesus, the rules have changed. We are no longer slaves to the rules, the laws, instead we are holy and free to be God's people. People who delight in the law of God, not the oppression of Empire.

We are God's people. We are Christians. And, dear friends, Christians resist laws that exclude and oppress our friends AND our enemies.

Christians live in joy and hope, humility and hospitality, welcome and courage.

Christians live loving neighbor and enemy.

Christians live knowing that we are holy because we are God's holy people made holy by the body and blood of Jesus Christ.

There is no barrier, no wall, no border that can separate us, the children of God from God's love and God's holiness.

Thanks be to God.