

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. My text is from today’s epistle lesson, specifically St. Paul’s words to the congregation in Philippi in chapter 3, vs. 8 where it says, “*For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as **enemies** of the cross of Christ.*”

A few of you may still recall the words of Rodney King—the poster boy for the 1992 “L. A. Race Riots” that cost many lives and over a billion dollars in property damage—when King asked the rhetorical question, “*Can’t we all just **get along**?*” Well, Hollywood has woven that concept into countless movies over the years promoting the idea that if we just try to get to **know** each other a little better, we’ll be able to eliminate the word “**enemy**” from our vocabulary.

I recall a particular science fiction movie based on that premise called “**Enemy Mine**”, where in the future an interstellar war between humans and some ugly reptilian humanoids is fought. They **hate** each other, so when the space ships of the two opponents go down in a dogfight over a desolate planet, the two **enemies** finally have to work together for three years just to **survive**...and of course, they become best of **friends** instead of the worst of **enemies**. Problem solved! No more enemies!

Wouldn’t it be wonderful if—no matter how diverse our opinions or radically different our beliefs and lifestyles, we all could just “**get along**” and be free of all **enmity** and no longer **enemies**? But life isn’t always successful into turning **enemies** in our **friends**, is it? So, what do we do **then**? On today’s date, 21 years ago, it was a **Tuesday**, and many of us here were doing what I was doing...sitting fixated in front of the TV as I watched in horror and disbelief not just **ONE** but **BOTH** of the Twin Towers crumble into clouds of fire and dust before my eyes, all because some insidious **ENEMIES** had caught us **unaware** and managed to accomplish the unthinkable. Then, in the midst of my shock and disbelief, it didn’t take long for my **anger** to form at these heinous **enemies** whose cunning and destructive power we had so naively **underestimated**.

And so, I come here this morning to remind you of something you’d probably rather **NOT** be reminded of! But here it **IS**: If you are a true, unabashed, card-carrying, washed-in-the-waters-of-baptism follower and representative of your personal Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ—you **WILL** have **ENEMIES**. In **FACT**, you’ll have more enemies than you literally **KNOW**!

This isn’t a very popular **notion**, especially with some Christians who seem more intent on “**fitting into the culture**”—or at least getting its **affirmation**—than daring to **oppose** that woke “**cancel culture**”. In fact, the entire **CONCEPT** of being an “**enemy**” or even **having** one, seems so “**out of sync**” with what many believers think it **means** to live a “**Christ-like**” life...a life that supposedly doesn’t create any enemies. And yet, it **ISN’T**!

“**Yes,**” you say, “*but just look at how Jesus taught His disciples to **treat** their enemies in Matt. 5:39 & 41, “*But I say, do not resist an evil person! If someone slaps you on the right cheek, offer the other cheek also...If a Roman soldier occupying Israel demands that you carry his gear for a mile, offer to carry it a **second** mile.*” And three verses later Jesus adds, “**Love** your enemies, **bless** them that curse you, do **good** to them that hate you, and **pray** for them who despitefully use you and persecute you” (Matt. 5:44). St. Paul adds even **more** about how to treat our enemies when he quotes Prov. 25 in Rom. 12:20, “*Therefore If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink, for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.*” That’s an ancient **idiom** similar to, “*Kill your enemy with kindness!*” **WHY?** I Pet. 3:15-16 explains that our returning of **good** for **evil** should make the perpetrator “**ashamed**,” that is, feel **guilty** for his actions. On the other hand, if someone treats us*

unkindly, and we treat him unkindly **back**, all we do is give him an excuse to **VINDICATE** his original bad behavior!

But did you notice something in all of this? God isn't vindicating the evils of our enemies or asking us even to act like they **AREN'T** our enemies...or **HIS!** What He **IS** doing is using us as an **example** to reflect that kind of undeserved grace toward **THEM** that He already showered on **US** by sending His Son to—“*reconcile the whole world unto Himself*” (2 Cor. 5:19). Yes, even God's enemies AND our enemies. And lest we **forget**, Paul says in Rom. 5:10, “*While WE (that's you and I) were enemies of God, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son...*” As the Cartoonist Walt Kelly once said, “**We have met the enemy, and he is US!**” Evidently, we **ourselves** were our own worst enemy! Speaking of which, who actually **ARE** our worst **enemies** (other than our **own** sinful nature)? Perhaps like the rich young man who asked Jesus, “*Who is my NEIGHBOR?*” we also need to ask, “**Who is our ENEMY?**”

**Sadly**, according to our text for this morning, **some** of those enemies were members of the congregation in Philippi. That brought Paul to literal **tears** because of their apostasy and knowing that were tearing the congregation apart...so MUCH so that Paul says they had become “**enemies of the cross**”! We don't know for sure, but a number of Bible scholars indicate that some Judaizers—teachers who believed Christians still had to obey the Old Testament Levitical rules and laws—had **infiltrated** the congregation and persuaded other members that instead of solely by God's GRACE, it still was their own good works **PLUS** Christ's sacrifice on the cross that brought salvation. That made these false teachers “**enemies of the cross**” within the Philippian church by making Christ's sacrificial death on the cross worthless!

**Christ Himself** had such enemies, **as well**, didn't He? Such as most of the Pharisees and Jewish religious leaders...the enemies He called a brood of vipers and white-washed tombs and blind guides. We see those blind guides today, as well. These enemies of Christ come knocking at our doors with names like The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints or Christian Science or Jehovah's Witnesses toting a false god and a false path to what they call heaven. We also see such enemies on television, shunning the word “sin” or “hell” for fear of offending their cash clientele and teaching a prosperity gospel from which the **preacher** seems to benefit the **most!** These, **TOO**, are “enemies of the cross”.

**But the MOST tragic of the enemies of the cross**, however, are the ones mentioned by Jesus in this morning's Gospel lesson. Listen to His words again: <sup>34</sup> “*Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.*”<sup>35</sup> *For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.* <sup>36</sup> **And a person's enemies will be those of his own household.** <sup>37</sup> *Whoever loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.* <sup>38</sup> **And whoever does not take His cross and follow Me is not worthy of me.**

<sup>39</sup> *Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.*

Remember the incident in **Mark 3:21**? We're told, “*When Jesus' family heard what was happening, they tried to take Him away! “He's out of His mind,” they said.*” Even Jesus **own family** initially acted like **enemies** by trying to stop Him from carrying out His messianic mission! For a while, they, too, were “**enemies of the cross.**” You see, Jesus' cross required the **ultimate** sacrifice to pay for our sins. The **daily crosses** Christ challenges **US** to bear are not even in the same **league** but **they, too**, require **sacrifice** and—even if it's with the best of **intentions** that our loved ones try to stop them—they can't be abrogated.

But it's in Eph. 6: 11-12 that St. Paul reveals our most **challenging** enemies of the cross where he warns, *"Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil."* <sup>12</sup> *For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, **against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places...*** to which St. Peter adds in 1 Peter 5:8, *"Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a **roaring lion**, seeking someone to devour!"*

And yet, as **formidable** as these supernatural enemies might seem, we need not worry, because we have the most effective weapon **available** to protect us—**God's Word of promise**—found in none other than Ps. 23:5, a verse we often let slide by us! *"**You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies,**"* where David compares a lush banquet for God's people with the lush tableland area the shepherd prepares for his flock for them to feed in safety to their heart's content. Even though, lurking in the shadows up on the cliffs above, there are wolves and coyotes pacing back and forth. Their lips are parched, their tongues wagging, their eyes glazed, watching the grazing sheep right in front of their faces. If they could only get their **teeth** into one of those sheep! But these enemies can't get to them, because on one side of the shepherd is a **rod** and on the other side of the shepherd is a **staff**, making everything **secure**, even in the presence of their enemies.

Have you ever heard of Ruby Bridges? Back in 1960, she was a 6-year-old black girl who was the first to attend a previously segregated, all-white school in New Orleans. Four Federal Agents accompanied her down a crowded gauntlet of angry protestors to the front door of the school. The agents had told her NOT to say anything or even glance to one side or the other, but to only keep focused only on that front door ahead...no matter what was shouted or thrown at her. She did exactly what she was told and reached the door...although one agent happened to notice that her lips were moving the whole time. When asked later about that, Ruby said, *"I was praying, 'Please God, forgive these people, because even if they say these mean things, they don't know what they're doing, so You can forgive them, just like You did those folks a long time ago, when they said terrible things about You.'"*

When surrounded by the presence of our **enemies**, we **also** would do well to **prayerfully** keep our eyes fixed on Jesus and His **cross** to carry us through. As it says in Heb.12:1-2, *"Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith."*

Jesus—the Prince of Peace—made it ironically clear that He did NOT come to bring peace but a **SWORD**...knowing that His message would create enemies. Little wonder His own life didn't end with a **coronation** but rather a **crucifixion**!

So also, if you take a good look at society right now, we believers are pretty much living behind enemy lines. And when behind enemy lines, there always are...well, **ENEMIES**! And yet, the goal is not to be **"enemy free"**, as though Christianity at its **purest** is so very **winsome** and **compelling** that no one who **"gets it"** will ever **reject** it. I wish! No, the Gospel **IS** scandalous and offensive. **Many** will openly reject it and even become enemies OF it, not to mention its moral mandates. But we are **not** called to embody our secular culture, but rather the Christian is called to **counter** culture. The Kingdom of **God** that we advance is not the secular kingdom currently in place.

So stop worrying about having **enemies**. **Instead**, concern yourself with having the **RIGHT** enemies and for the right **REASONS**! By that I mean, for example: Do **NOT** have enemies because you are **intentionally offensive** in your spirit...in other words, an "ornery cuss". Do **NOT** have enemies because you are **caustic** and **abrasive**. Do **NOT** have enemies because you are **unfeeling, uncaring, and unloving**.

But...**DO** have enemies because you stand for **truth...GOD'S** inspired and inerrant Truth of His Word. **DO** have enemies because you will not waver in the face of a majority opinion when it clashes with **Biblical authority**. And **DO** have enemies when you will not sacrifice your personal, **Godly** convictions!

Written back in the 1400's, Thomas à Kempis' *Imitation of Christ* is perhaps the most widely read Christian devotional work after the Bible. Kempis writes, "*Jesus has many lovers of His heavenly Kingdom, but few bearers of His Cross. He has many desirous of consolation, but few of tribulation. Many love Jesus so long as no adversities befall them.*" You can't delude yourself into thinking you can have a "**crossless Christianity**" or that you'll never have to be concerned about confronting the enemies of the cross around you.

Avoiding the pain of our **own** cross is not a new syndrome for followers of Christ. About a thousand years earlier, St. Augustine of Hippo wrote: "*It is necessary to die, but nobody wants to! We want to reach the kingdom of God, but we don't want to travel by way of death. And yet there stands Necessity saying: "This way, please!"*"

My fellow cross-bearers, we are **NOT** here on earth to **AVOID** the cross but to lift it **HIGH**...even in the presence of the **ENEMY**...and yes, even when those enemies of the cross might be members of our own **family**!

Life **ISN'T** always successful into turning enemies in our friends. But then, that's not our **assignment**. **OUR** job is to help turn those enemies toward the **CROSS** where they can discover **JESUS** as their **BEST friend**...as well as something much, much **MORE**—their Savior!

In **HIS** Name, Amen!