

**Leaning into the Messy / Unit 7: Love Your Enemies**  
**Sermon 4: “We have met the enemy, and he is ...”**  
**March 27, 2016 (Easter)**

One of the ways a movie pulls us in is to get us to identify with one of the characters. Now, this is a gripping scene from American Sniper! (*Restart Sniper Video*) How many terrible decisions are made in this scene.

- A mom decides to sacrifice her child to kill the enemy.
- A child, in his innocent ignorance, decides to do what his mom tells him to do.
- A sniper has to make a decision: do I shoot a child to save some our men?

And what do you feel as you watch this scene unfold? Well, that probably depends on which of the characters you choose to identify with.

- Are you the spotter with the binoculars, just observing, watching, wondering?
- Are you the one with the sniper rifle? If so, what emotions do you process? Are you sure that you saw what you think you saw? Can you take one life to save several? Even if that life has barely begun?
- What if you identify with one of the soldiers, what if you saw a child walking towards you on the street, suddenly shot down – what would go through your mind?
- But, can you identify with the child? Does he know? Does he understand what he is doing? Does he really have any idea why, other than that his mother told him to do it? Does he hate too? Does he understand the danger he is walking into? Does he understand death?
- Maybe this one is the toughest. Can you identify with the mother? Have you ever hated so intensely that you would sacrifice your child to kill those you hate?

It makes a difference where you put yourself in the story, doesn't it? It makes a difference who you identify as the enemy. What happens will either be a poignantly tragic success, or a poignantly tragic defeat.

Well, what if ... What if we take the scene and make it into a metaphor for our real story. What if we could – for just a moment – picture God (I know this is weird, but what if we could picture God) as the sniper. In fact, some

people do picture God as the worst kind of sniper: he's up there scanning for sinners, stern, fierce, angry, drawing down on those who disrespect him. He's not that kind of God, but what if in our metaphor God is the sniper, where are you in the story? Are you one of the good guys he is protecting? Or are you one of the bad guys in his sights? How would it feel to be an enemy of God?

Well, as offensive as that sounds, that's not as far off as you think. You see, how we view ourselves when we push God away, and how God views us when we push him away – those viewpoints are very different. You see, the Bible describes those of us who push God away in ways that we would consider offensive, over the top, even absurd. But God has a decision to make, and frankly, our attitudes, and our actions give him no painless options. What will he do? What did he do?

Here at Capital City we've been exploring all the ways God tells us to lean in to the messy since September. We're wrapping it up today, and then we'll have kind of a celebration service next Sunday. Last month we talked about leaning in to our neighbors, even when they are messy, because God tells us to love our neighbors – that's the second greatest commandment, he says. And this month we have been talking about what's even tougher. He tells us to love our enemies. Now that's kind of weird to us, and it's really hard. But it's not just something he tells us to do, it's something he does. And that's where we are going this morning.

I want to explore two incredibly powerful scriptures this morning. I want us to try to understand what they tell us about ourselves, and what they tell us about our God. Here's the first. The Bible says, "Once (at one time) you were alienated from God, and (you) were enemies in your minds, because of your evil behavior." (Colossians 1.21) Paul says we were alienated from God — we were estranged, we were separated from God. He never wanted that alienation to happen. You and I, we made it that way. We distanced ourselves from God. We made choices we have to live with. Were there other influences? Oh, sure, they were there to coax and coach us. But it was my choice to make God my enemy...yours, too. We are the mom in the scene; we're the kid. God looks down the scope and He recognizes -- we are the enemy. He knows we are going to hurt others; and He knows we are going to hurt ourselves. He doesn't want it to be that way. So what should He do? What would you do?

But that's not how most people see themselves, even those who are not Jesus followers. Most people would say, "Just because God and I aren't close doesn't mean we are enemies!" They would say, "I may not call Jesus the Lord of my life, I may not be a Christian, I may not be a Jesus follower, but I don't consider God my enemy!" But here's the deal – this is hard for us to get: it really doesn't matter how I see me; it really doesn't matter how you see you; what really counts is how God sees us. There are people I don't consider enemies, but that's how they see me. And the Bible says, "Once ... when you were pushing God away ... you were enemies of God." That was our reality, whether we want to admit it or not.

So, if God is the sniper in the metaphor, his scope was trained on me. And if God looks deep inside us -- nothing is hidden from him -- and he knows that, unless he's at the center of our life, the path we are on is going to hurt people ... We are not the good guys in the scene. We're not the soldiers coming down the road with American flags on our shoulders. We're the kid, we're the mom, we're the enemy, and we're on a path that will do great harm to ourselves, and to others. So what does God do? What would you do?

But we push back so hard! That just doesn't sound right to us. "I'm not an enemy of God!" we tell ourselves. "I might sin sometimes, but I am not a ... Sinner! (with a capital S)" "I might tell a few little lies, I might swear a little from time to time, I might say some things that are mean (although they did deserve it), I might go to some websites I probably shouldn't, but that doesn't make me a bad person, does it?" "I might spend a little too much on myself, I might be a little stingy with those I could help, I might not give much of anything back to God, but I'm no worse than most!" "I guess I might drink too much sometimes, I might eat a bit too much, I might spend too much time on stuff that doesn't matter and too little time on stuff that does. I might sin, but that doesn't make me an enemy of God, does it?" Well ... yeah, in one sense it does.

And here's the deal: Do you know what the biggest sin is? Do you know what the worst sin of all is? What if it is just turning our back on Jesus? What if the worst sin we can commit is marginalizing the Son of God, the one God sent to save us? What if the biggest sin of all is living like God doesn't matter, like what he has done for us doesn't deserve to be the

centerpiece of our life? Guys, we were made to do life with God. So what if the biggest sin of all is ... not doing life with God?

You see, the Bible tells it really straight. The apostle Paul, in the book of Romans puts it like this. He says, "No one is righteous—not even one." Now that sounds harsh, doesn't it? But be honest: are you the exception? He says, "No one is truly wise; no one is seeking God." Again, are you the exception? He says, "All have turned away (that "all" includes ... most of us, I think); all have become useless. No one does good, not a single one." (Romans 3.10-12) ... Not enough good to negate what he says a few verses later. He says, "All have sinned (no exceptions; all have sinned) and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3.23) Which makes us – without Jesus – God's enemies, from God's perspective. Have you ever heard the proverb: "We have met the enemy, and he is us"? He is ... us. You see, our choices have made our allegiance as clear as if we were wearing uniforms: if we are not serving Jesus, we are serving the enemy. If we don't get that, we don't get Good Friday, and Easter.

So ... here is how we would like the scene to unfold: The kid is walking towards the enemy, with the grenade hidden under his arm. But as he gets closer, he finally gets it: "I can't do this thing! I can't hurt these guys!" So he throws up his arms in surrender. I could get into that. Or maybe we'd like to see the scene resolved like this: Suddenly the mother is gripped with remorse. Her son is about to kill some men she really does not know, her son is about to die. So she shouts at him, and she runs as fast as she can, and with tears in her eyes she tears the grenade from his hands...

But in our story, it doesn't go that way. The way the scene unfolds in our story is way more gripping, way more captivating – almost absurdly so. But first I've got to set it up. I'm going to take you to a scripture that you cannot just understand intellectually, you have to feel it. If you don't feel it, you don't get it. You see, it's one of the things that stirs us most. (*start video here*) We read in the news where a soldier gives his life for a buddy, where a mom or a dad risks their life for a child, where a cop or a fireman goes into harm's way to rescue someone in trouble. Self-sacrifice stirs something in us. It's one of the greatest themes in literature, one of the most powerful themes that threads its way through our movies.

- Tom Hanks, and the rest of his unit, give their lives to save Private Ryan.
- Clint Eastwood, a racist, grumpy, grizzled old man, giving his life for the Vietnamese kids he has come to love in Gran Torino.
- In the Lord of the Rings Gandalf and his band are pursued by a powerful demonic creature called a Balrog. Gandalf turns to fight it alone, sacrificing his life to save the rest of his little band.
- Obi-Wan Kenobi faces Darth Vader alone, allowing Luke and Leia and Han to escape.
- Spock goes into the engine room to repair the warp drive, exposing himself to deadly radiation, because sometimes the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few, or the one.
- This theme of self sacrifice even weaves it's way through Disney films. In Frozen, Anna gives her life for her sister Elsa – she is frozen in her place.
- In Big Hero 6 Hiro and Baymax go into a wormhole to save Abigail. But Baymax has to sacrifice himself to help the other two escape.
- In Inside Out, Bingbong and Joy are trapped in the “pit where memories are destroyed,” and only one of them can make it out. So Bingbong gives his life to save Joy.
- In one of the greatest stories by one of the greatest storytellers ever, Aslan exchanges his life for the troubled little boy Edmund in The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe.

These great stories of personal sacrifice entrance us. Do you know why? Because every great story becomes our story. We enter in. We want that to be our courage, our selflessness, our love, our self-sacrifice. These stories challenge us, they inspire us, they transform us. We'd like to think we'd give our life for a Private Ryan. That we would grow to love and protect these Vietnamese kids. That we would battle a dragon to save our friends. But more than that, every one of these stories draws its power from the big, fat story of God, what he did for us.

It's such a powerful idea: self-sacrifice -- a hero puts themselves in harm's way to rescue another. There is something so noble about sacrifice. And the apostle Paul understands that too. This is what he writes. He says, “Most people would not be willing to die (even) for an upright person.” Be honest; most of us would be reluctant to die for someone else, even if that someone else is a good man, or a good woman. Paul says, “Though

someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good.” (Romans 5.7) Maybe.

Have you ever seriously wondered who you would die for? I'd like to think I'd be willing to die for my wife, or my kids, or my grandkids. Would you? (Not for my wife and kids, but for your own?) Would you die for a parent? What if your parent was old and sick? Would you die for a really, really, really good friend? Would you die for a stranger? That would be harder, wouldn't it? Which is why we give such honor to our first responders.

Well here's a movie I have never seen. Here's the story Hollywood hasn't done justice to, yet. Because it is so far beyond what we can wrap our minds around. (*Sniper video*) What you can't see in this version of the story is that the soldiers coming down the road are not Americans, they are Taliban. You can't tell that this child is moving toward our enemy, he's preparing to kill our enemy. So the sniper, who is not Taliban, has the boy in the crosshairs. But he drops the rifle, and he scrambles down to the street, and he sprints towards the boy. And as the boy rares back to hurl the grenade towards the Taliban the sniper seizes the grenade, dives onto the ground with the grenade beneath him, and absorbs the blast, saving the life of the boy, the mom, and his enemies. ... He doesn't kill to save his friends, he dies ... for his enemies.

Well ... that's just weird; that's just wrong! In fact that's almost immoral – to save the enemy. It's unbelievable. It's inconceivable – impossible to believe ... almost. But that's what the apostle Paul says God did. He says, “But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.” (Romans 5.8) While we were still sinners. While we were his enemies. He died, not for his friends, but for his enemies.

I suppose the power of this verse became most vivid to me in a class I was teaching on Romans at Kentucky Christian University a couple years ago. One of my students was young soldier just back from Afghanistan. He was a fine young man. You could tell that he valued courage, and honor. We were studying these verses in Romans 5. Verse 7: “Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die.” And I asked this young soldier, “Would you take a bullet for a friend? Would you have taken a bullet for one of your

buddies?” And I knew what he would say. My son was a soldier. He straightened up, his chest swelled, he looked me straight in the eyes, and he said, “Yes sir!” And everyone in the class believed him ... including me.

And then I asked him, “Would you have taken a bullet for one of your enemies? Would you have stepped in front of a bullet for one of the guys who was trying to kill you and yours?” Now that’s a stupid question, isn’t it? That’s absurd! That would be treasonous! That would be immoral! But in class we had just read verse 8: “God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners (while we were still his enemies), (Christ took a bullet for us,) Christ died for us.” (Romans 5.8) It’s crazy! And this young soldier got it. He didn’t just get it here (*head*), he got it here (*heart*). And he folded his arms on the table in front of him, and he buried his face in his hands, and he was silent, he was still for about 5 minutes. He got it, and it overwhelmed him: God loves us with a crazy love! That’s what Jesus did for us. That’s what we were when he did it for us. The sniper left the safety of his nest to take the bullet for us, when we deserved it.

I’ve been wracking my brain. You might think of one, but I can’t think of a movie in which the hero dies for his enemies, where he takes the place of his enemies, where he takes what they deserve. You see, what God did, what Jesus did just goes beyond our imaginations, almost into the realm of absurdity. While we were sinners, while we were his enemies, he still loved us that much. Not because of who we were, but because of who he is...

And that’s the story of the cross. But the cross is not enough. That’s the story of Good Friday, but it’s not the story of Easter, and this is Easter. If our story had stopped with Good Friday, it would still be an amazing story. Jesus would be the greatest of martyrs. But we need more than a martyr, a model of self-sacrifice. We need way more than a dead hero. And if Jesus had stayed in the tomb, that’s all he would be. But on Easter morning, when God raised him from the dead, he became way more than a dead hero. He became a Savior.

Listen to the apostle Paul as he moves to the coup de grace. He says, “If, while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the

death of his Son (– that’s Good Friday), how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! (that’s Easter)” (Romans 5.10) Guys, if, when we were God’s enemies, when we were at our worst, God loved us so much that he died to take away our sins, how much more, now that we have been purified through his son, now that we are God’s friends through Jesus, how much more will he lead us into a brand new kind of life – a life infinitely better on this earth, a life that extends into ... forever!

Can you get that? Do you understand what God has done for us? Do you understand what he is offering you? Guys, without Jesus we are a mess. Without Jesus, I don’t care who you are, you are not going to make it. And yet God loves us anyway. And he has already done what is necessary to fix what’s broken in you ... if you will just give him the place he deserves in your life... We are going to sing a song of worship. I don’t want you to get so caught up in the music that you miss the words. Listen to what we are going to say ...

Alone in my sorrow and dead in my sin. (That’s where we were)  
Lost without hope with no place to begin (That’s where we were)  
Your love made a way to let mercy come in  
(That’s) When death was arrested and my life began.

(Now) Released from my chains, I’m a prisoner no more  
My shame was a ransom He faithfully bore.  
He cancelled my debt and He called me His friend  
That’s when death (my death) was arrested and my life began.

### *Death Was Arrested*

Guys, someday ... Someday every one of us is going to stand before God. And what he does with us on that day will depend on what we do with Jesus here. So here’s what you need to do: you need to be ruthlessly honest. You need to admit who you are, what you’ve done. You need to admit that you can’t fix what you’ve broken. You need to own it. You need to come to the realization that an apology is not enough, it is beyond restitution. You need to decide for yourself if you really believe Jesus died for your sins, in your place. You can feel God’s Spirit nudging you. He rose from that grave and offers you a brand new life.



Now, you need to decide whose side you are on. There is no vacillating on this one. There can be no neutrality on this one. He's either the Lord of your life, or he's not. You either give him his rightful place in your life, or you face God that day without him.

Guys, he loves you that much – no matter who you are, no matter where you've been, no matter what you've done, he loves you that much. He offers you life. And he's got the power to keep his promises. When he walked out of the tomb he proved that he can change your life in this world, and he can offer you life in the next.

In a moment, LS.

- Why we do it.
- What we do.
- Who it is for.

Near the worship stations you can see some black boards. They have little slips of paper on them – little black post-it notes. If you are a Jesus follower, we would like you to go to one of these boards before you go to the worship station and pull off one of these black slips of paper. These slips of paper represent who you were before you gave yourself to Jesus. (*crumple it up*) But it's not who we are now. Because of the cross, and because of the resurrection, it's not who we are now. We would like you to remove one of these slips of paper and take it to the worship station, and exchange it for the bread and the cup. This (paper) is not you anymore, because of what is on that table.

Now if you are not a Jesus follower ...