

2022 Lenten Week 1

March 6, 2022

We welcome you to this year's Lenten Journey.

Our world remains messy. The discord that erupted in the past few years have not subsided. Our country seems increasingly divided in opposite camps on so many different realities and issues. The global tensions exacerbate the prevailing adversarial and combative spirit. This has made life edgy for everyone as we attempt to resume our relationships with people at work, at home, at school, in our neighborhoods, even at Evergreen.

Join us as we explore the areas where "bad blood" now flows in our lives. and invite God to work in and through our lament and repentance.

Paul reminds us that our fall into sin has broken our intended relationship with God, creation, and others. Consider meditating daily on and memorizing Romans 5:8-10 during this season:

"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!"

INVITATION

- Think of a few words that describe how you feel as you enter this Lenten season.

RECEIVING THE WORD

Our anchor text is Matthew 5:43-48. Jesus' call to love our enemies is both extremely relevant but also discouragingly hard. Read this passage in these versions, pausing in between to pay attention to the Spirit's prompting and leading.

NRSV

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.

The Voice

⁴³ You have been taught to love your neighbor and hate your enemy. ⁴⁴ But I tell you this: love your enemies. Pray for those who torment you and persecute you— ⁴⁵ in so doing, you become children of your Father in heaven. *He, after all, loves each of us—good and evil, kind and cruel.* He causes the sun to rise *and shine* on evil and good alike. He causes the rain *to water the fields* of the righteous and *the fields* of the sinner. ⁴⁶ It is easy to love those who love you—even a tax collector can love those who love him. ⁴⁷ And it is easy to greet your friends—even outsiders do that! ⁴⁸ *But you are called to something higher:* “Be perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect.”

The Message

⁴³⁻⁴⁷ “You’re familiar with the old written law, ‘Love your friend,’ and its unwritten companion, ‘Hate your enemy.’ I’m challenging that. I’m telling you to love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst. When someone gives you a hard time, respond with the supple moves of prayer, for then you are working out of your true selves, your God-created selves. This is what God does. He gives his best—the sun to warm and the rain to nourish—to everyone, regardless: the good and bad, the nice and nasty. If all you do is love the lovable, do you expect a bonus? Anybody can do that. If you simply say hello to those who greet you, do you expect a medal? Any run-of-the-mill sinner does that. ⁴⁸ “In a word, what I’m saying is, *Grow up.* You’re kingdom subjects. Now live like it. Live out your God-created identity. Live generously and graciously toward others, the way God lives toward you.”

- What stood out as you listened to the different versions?
- What is your definition of “enemy”? How is this different from an opponent or an adversary?
- Why do you think Jesus gave his followers (and us) this teaching?
- If there is bad blood, how does one pray with truth and love in mind?

SPIRITUAL COMPANIONSHIP WITH OTHERS

These questions are designed for your group to engage and apply the biblical truths into your Lenten experience. Feel free to select which one seems most appropriate.

- Where and with whom are you experiencing relational discord? Is there a power dynamic present? How does this impact your pursuing “love your enemies”?
- What do you most desire this Lent? What might you “fast” from or “feast” on?

THE PRAYER OF LAMENT

_Close your time with “The Prayer of Lament.” This may be difficult and uncomfortable at the beginning, but with consistency and intentionality, we may find our hearts and minds growing more congruent – that our inner yearnings reflect our faith understanding. Be patient. Be open. Give God permission and space.

This week we will use Psalm 13 to model our own lament conversation with God.

¹ How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?

² How long must I bear pain in my soul, and have sorrow in my heart all day long? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

³ Consider and answer me, O Lord my God! Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death,⁴ and my enemy will say, “I have prevailed”; my foes will rejoice because I am shaken.

⁵ But I trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. ⁶ I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me.