

Homily  
February 23, 2025  
7<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time  
24:28 – 37:14

A jug of water and a spear. That's what David and Abishai found next to Saul, totally asleep, surrounded by his soldiers, his generals – and no one noticed them. And as we heard, Abishai was ready to use the one. He was very ready to “stick it,” literally, to Saul.

A jug of water. It's a symbol of life. The spear, a symbol of protection and power. Both could have literally, in terms of Saul's life, been taken from him. But they were not. Why? Because Saul was God's anointed one.

And David, even though he had Saul in his power and he could have brought all this conflict to an end, wouldn't do it. He wasn't going to touch this one anointed by God. So he takes the symbols, the jug of water and the spear, and goes to the other side of the ravine. And without taunting, urges Saul and his generals to come and get it. “I'm not going to harm the anointed one of God.”

Can you imagine what Abishai was thinking throughout this whole thing? “Are you out of your mind?! It's perfect. Let's do it.”

But this was the anointed one. And David stretched beyond the feeling for revenge of this one who had once held him in high regard and now was his enemy. Saul belonged to God and David was not going to take what God had done, away.

I'm sure Abishai felt really stretched. Probably wondering, “What's wrong with this guy?”

Jesus in the Gospel, in this part of the Sermon on the Plain, urges his disciples to go beyond the Law. It has an echo of Matthew's three chapters in the Sermon on the Mount. You've heard it. “Say...but I say...” But he doesn't do that here.

He simply goes, “I say to you, ‘love your enemies.’ “

Now we all know Leviticus Chapter 19, verse 18. Right? You could quote it any time, couldn't you, Rebecca? Of course you could. “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

That's the command. But it is said as “neighbor” being one of your own. The original precept is about taking care of those who are yours: your clan, your family, the people of Israel. It did not extend to the Gentiles, the Philistines or whomever.

However, over time that precept got stretched – especially in Jesus’ own time, when he says in another place, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” including the Samaritan who shows you how to be a neighbor. The foreigner. The disliked. The “loathed one” shows the way.

But now in this Gospel passage, which actually falls before the story of the Samaritan, Jesus stretches it even to the Nth degree. “Love your enemy.”

We heard all of the examples he gives. Why do this? Because your heavenly Father is merciful. He has shown you the way. Now do as your heavenly Father does.

How many here like to stretch? (raising his right hand) Physically stretch. How many detest it? Yes. Leland. I can understand that. How many have ever had Physical Therapy?

You know what Physical Therapy is? Controlled stretching. And good physical therapists only take you to the point where there is a slight stretch, or maybe a little more. But not pain. They don’t want to take you to the pain point because you might injure yourself again. Lord knows, that’s not a good idea.

(To Beverly Durham) So you’ve been through physical therapy. Pain! You just call it pain. (laughter) She doesn’t care what I say. (more laughter) Guess what. That’s been going on for 8 and a half years.

But the stretch, it’s incremental. I can now get this arm to go this high (demonstrating with the left arm – woohoo!) But it’s progress. But it’s only because it’s one bit at a time.

Is there pain? Of course there’s pain, but it’s healing pain. It’s conversion pain. It’s the kind of pain that is just as good as going to the gym and working out.

David stretches Abishai and Saul and Abner and all those who witnessed. He stretches them beyond the human moment and reminds them of the spiritual. No. God anointed Saul.

Jesus stretches all of his disciples in all of those examples:

Love your enemy. Do good to those who persecute you. You name it. But he doesn’t say, “Do it now!”

The Gospel does say, “Be merciful as your heavenly Father is merciful.” But God is God and we’re not.

So, just like that stretching that – Andrew, where are you? There you are! - You’re a runner, right? Kind of! But you do the stretching to prepare for the exercise and to prevent injury.

What Jesus is asking us to do, my brothers and sisters, is s-t-r-e-t-c-h. Stretch when we encounter someone we dislike. Try it then. Stretch when someone says something nasty to us. Hopefully to our face, as opposed to this (pointing behind his back). Stretch with the neighbor who irritates you.

I'm going to stop giving examples. But I am going to ask a question that is going to make it even harder. So I warned you.

This week I was in a discussion with some people of other religions and other Christians. It's called Sacred Friendships. And we were talking about February as, "love," you know, Valentine's Day. We talked about it from all the points of view of our various traditions.

Eventually, somebody in the group (raises his hand), happened to mention this particular Gospel passage, about loving your enemy. And we took off from there. Our friend, Rabbi Aaron Spiegel, asked a question.

I love Rabbis. They not only can ask really good questions, but they can argue both sides of the question. He asked, "You know, who is my enemy?" He said, "I keep trying to wrap my head around that. Who is my enemy?"

Because you see, if we're going to stretch to love the enemy, we've got to know who the enemy is. We've got to admit that's how we hold them.

"Oh Father. Why did we have to go down this road?"

It's a heck of a question. It's hard enough when we hear this because we think, "Oh-ho-oh." But will we name our enemy? Because only then can we truly stretch to love that person, as opposed to ignoring them. Or badmouthing them somewhere.

Spiritual therapy.

That's what Jesus is asking us to practice, to the point where we grow stronger in the Gospel.

May it be so.

And may we be able to answer sometime this week the question, "Who is my enemy?"