

I think there are parts of following Jesus that we are more comfortable with. And there are parts of following Jesus that we are less comfortable with.

This morning's reading is probably my favorite reading in all the New Testament—no—heck—the whole Bible!

And that's interesting—since it pushes all the buttons of discomfort.

*"Do not judge, and you will not be judged; There's an uncomfortable one.*

We judge a lot. We judge whether we like or dislike bible verses, whether people are really smart and wealthy enough to be Episcopalians—come on we do. We judge whether *other* people are doing the right thing. We judge whether people are living the right way. We judge whether we believe the world is round or flat, and we judge whether people are born gay or choose it.

And you know what—it doesn't even matter if we are wrong or right sometimes—judgements makes us feel better about the world we live in and about ourselves.

There's always someone who is more wrong than we are, and there's always someone whose life makes us cringe and therefore keeps us from dwelling overlong on what there might be in our lives that make us cringe.

*Jesus said, "I say to you that listen, Love your enemies*

I say to you who will listen, Jesus says. And we listen. But do we hear? Do we understand? Do we even want to hear this hard thing? Because these hard things Jesus says can go against what we've been taught.

In Matthew's version of this conversation, Jesus say, *"You have heard it said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies."*

When Jesus says "you have heard it said", he is referring to the fact that people have heard this from scripture. There's even a citation in the bible as

to where we have heard it. If you ever wanted a sign that the bible is not infallible: here it is. Jesus says it's not infallible right here.

*"You have heard it said in the scriptures, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, that's wrong. Love your enemies."*

The Bible says "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." That's bible speak for something we hear all the time. A person does something that is not right. They need to be punished. They deserve to be punished. Right? An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.

So—we HAVE heard it in the scriptures. And we've also all heard things in our homes growing up that stick with us forever. Things we've been told that run like a tape in our heads.

My grandmother taught my dad that blacks were untrustworthy, and Jews were filthy. When I was about 12, my father, grandmother, sister and I had gone out to dinner and Laurie and I were raving about how much we loved Barbara Streisand's voice and songs. My grandmother said, "She's a filthy Jewess."

My sister and I both looked up in shock, and then we looked over at our dad, who was ignoring his mom. Didn't want to rock the boat. Didn't want to upset his mother. And—he lost an opportunity to point out that what she had said was racist and wrong, which I am sure he believed.

And—incidentally—he lost the opportunity to teach my sister and I that it is all right to quietly stand up for what one believes in when hate takes the floor. I don't think we do that enough in society. I know I don't.

My parents also taught me many good things: they routinely had black choir members to our house for a game of cards on the weekend. In the 60's. There's an example of showing us kids love and mercy in action.

Remember those times when we were taught to hate someone-- and later we realized that they were OK? Good even? Here are some examples:

The bible is clear: foreigners and eunuchs are anathema to God. (Deut), but THEN comes the story of an African eunuch welcomed into the church. (Acts)

The bible is clear: God's people HATE Samaritans. Then Jesus tells a story that makes the Samaritan a lasting icon of grace and love.

Let's have a more recent example: the Japanese & Germans were our enemies, until they were our allies. Love your enemies. Over and over again, people who were enemies, at some point become our friends.

Or how about this example: Left-handedness is wrong. Left-handed people are of the devil.

Do we believe that anymore? Time and science have showed us that left-handedness is genetic. Part of God's plan of biogenetic diversity.

LGBTQ people are monsters. It says so in the bible. Mentally ill people are to be shunned. They have demons. It says so in the bible.

I wonder what time and science, and this overflowing love Jesus keeps trying to engage us in, will show us?

The stories we are told may contain prejudice, discrimination and animosity to anyone we don't yet understand or accept, but Jesus asks us to move towards love, non-judgement, and mercy. Sometimes our biggest enemy is our need to be RIGHT. But Jesus says:

- *Love everyone, even your "enemies".*
- *Do to others as you would have them do to you.*
- *Be merciful, just as God is merciful.*
- *"Do not judge, and you will not be judged;*
- *Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned.*
- *Forgive, and you will be forgiven;*
- *Give, and it will be given to you.*

*And my friends, my fellow Jesus followers, that is good news. Amen.*