

**DO I REALLY HAVE TO HATE YOU?**  
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I hate you.

It seems really, really odd for me to stand up here on a Sunday morning.  
and say that to you, my brothers and sisters in Christ  
But, well, Jesus says I have to hate you. I have to hate you to be his disciple.

But. Wait.

The writer of the epistle says I have to love you, my brothers and sister in Christ.  
If I hate you, basically I'm murdering you.  
No wonder being a good Christian is hard.

What am I going to do with this?

I think I'll go back to what I heard from one of my favorite priests, Jim Miner,  
when, in my late 30s, I was just starting out on my adult journey of faith  
While contemplating two seemingly incompatible verses of Scripture,  
Jim quoted Niels Bohr, a physicist who won the Nobel Prize:  
(How Episcopalian for a priest to quote a physicist!) Bohr said:

*The opposite of a correct statement is a false statement.*

*But the opposite of a profound truth may well be another profound truth.*

In this case, context is everything for understanding these opposing truths.

Jesus is talking to people – LOTS of people – who are following him around.

Not following him, just following him around.

He's healed a bunch of folks, fed 5,000 people, stilled a storm,  
and is getting the Jewish religious types very upset with him.

But Jesus isn't one to believe his own press and get full of himself,  
(which is the downfall of so many people who become famous).

Instead, Jesus tells people following him around

that the cost of discipleship is enormous and they need to consider carefully what the demands are.

Discipleship means, literally, a student learning to be like the master.

Jesus warns that being his disciple is not a part time job.

Learning to be like him, the Master, takes concerted, mindful effort 24/7/365.

Anything, and especially anyone, that we permit to distract us from that  
is something or someone we are putting ahead of him, the Son of God.

The short word for putting someone or something ahead of God is idolatry.

In the Book of Common Prayer on p. 350 is the Decalogue, the 10 Commandments.

Idolatry is THE number one no-no in the Commandment hit parade.

The First Commandment is: *I am the Lord your God who brought you out of bondage.*

*You shall have no other gods but me.*

You'll notice "god" is spelled differently, once with a big-G, and once with a little-g.

The big-G God is the Almighty one we call by name, like we'd call Frank or John or Sheila.

What is a little-g "god"? It's whatever we trust our lives with, what we dedicate our lives to.

Everyone – even the staunchest atheist – has a little-g god.

There are obvious examples of little-g gods, such as money, status, alcohol,

gambling, and other addictions – the list of possibilities is pretty long, and it includes family ties.

I don't want to give you any new ideas, so I'll stop there.

What does it mean to hate one's father or mother for the sake of discipleship?

Now, when I say this, I can almost hear a bunch of shoulders drooping,

I can almost hear the thoughts of "I love my family. Do I even want to live that way?"

Yes, we do. Really. Stay with me here.

I remember a story my mother told me many years ago about Joyce.

Joyce was the quintessential good Southern daughter and wife.

Her church in the 1940s and 50s had taught her that, as a woman,

she was to be utterly obedient to the men in her life, first to her father, then to her husband.

Joyce herself told the story of the time when she was a teenager learning to drive;

her father rode with her one day, mashing the imaginary brake pedal on passenger-side floor  
as she lurched through the streets. As they were going along the road, a stray dog ran out.

Joyce heard her father say, "Hit that dog!"

With startled tears springing to her eyes, even though she loved animals,

Joyce obediently sped up to hit the dog.

Then her father shouted, "Slow down! I told you, don't hit that dog!"

Joyce slammed on the brakes and missed the dog, who lumbered off.

I have no idea why Joyce told that story, but my mom was astonished at Joyce's choice  
to let her father's command (even though she'd misheard him)

override her own sense of what was right and wrong.

Joyce's freedom to do the will of God had been taken away

by our culture's demand that women obey men.

Sometimes the parent is the problem, though.

Consider the letter to Carolyn Hax in her "Tell Me About It" advice column in yesterday's paper.<sup>1</sup>

The letter is from a parent – we don't know if it's mom or dad – who wrote:

*My daughter 'Fiona' is 21 and just moved to her own apartment.*

*Fiona has always been empathetic and kind. She donates her time at soup kitchens,  
fosters rescue animals and will go the extra mile for friends and family.*

*Today she sent out a family-and-friends group text saying*

*she has discovered an encampment of homeless people living near her.*

*She wants to help and has asked us to donate spare blankets, warm clothing,  
feminine hygiene products, 'durable' non-cook foods (e.g., peanut butter,  
granola bars, crackers) and toiletries, and she will stop by and deliver them [to the camp].*

*This is a wonderful idea but it seems risky, and I am conflicted.*

*It seems to me like a bad move at this time in Fiona's life. She lives alone, and close to the encampment.*

*Sometimes desperate people do desperate things.*

*I would rather she tempered her generosity with practical safety,  
and let us donate to a homeless shelter in her name, rather than her hand-delivering items.*

*How should I reply?*

Carolyn's answer to Fiona's parent was this:

*Reply with a donation of spare blankets, warm clothing, feminine hygiene products,  
accessible foods and/or toiletries.*

*She is going to be the person who does things like this no matter what, with or without your support.*

*She'll do it next time even if you talk her out of it this time,*

*and she's going to do her own accounting of risk versus reward.*

*I know you're worried. But I think you will feel better if you choose, consciously,  
to turn your face toward her light.*

*Congratulations on raising this beautiful child.*

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<sup>1</sup> Carolyn Hax, "Is it Safe for Daughter to Help the Homeless?" in *Tell Me About It*, Tampa Bay Times, Saturday, September 7, 2019, p. 1F.

One of Carolyn's readers chimed in with this: *I'm involved in homeless outreach.*

*All of the things Fiona asked for are desperately needed by people experiencing homelessness, and what a wonderful thing she wants to do. If you're scared, offer to go out with her . . .*

Let's pray Fiona's parents follow Jesus by walking with Fiona.

In telling us to hate anything and anyone that gets in the way of discipleship, Jesus is giving everyone – EVERYONE – eternal life, the life of the Eternal One, God, right here and right now.

He gives everyone the gift of freedom to do God's will by following God's way of living, not humanity's system of domination and seeking personal comfort and security at the expense of others.

And God's way is our future, or God isn't God!

When Jesus talks about counting the cost of building a tower and bringing peace, he is talking about the coming Reign of God.

God is building his tower, his kingdom, now, and God is willing and able to pay the cost of building it in our midst.

The cost of building that kingdom will be the very life of God, as we nail him to the Cross to keep him from changing anything.

Our attempt to stop God didn't work, because death didn't then and never will stop God from building the Kingdom. It will be completely built in God's good time.

The same way, God is discussing the terms of peace with humanity, using a small handful of people – his church – against the violent kingdoms of humanity.

God does not seek victory by fighting and killing, because then everyone loses.

Instead, our Lord sends us, his representatives, to sit down with our enemies and teach peace: the healing of all Creation, which is God's project, God's will, God's plan for all that is.

That's when we can see that the verse in 1 John is also true.

The way that God's church is to take part in God's plan for Creation is to do live according to what Jesus, our Lord, our master, taught his disciples, his students: they must love one another as he loves us.

The Greek word for this love is ἀγάπη [agape]. It's not a love we feel, it's a love we do. It's the love that does what is best for the other, even if it costs us dearly, or, as in the case of Jesus, it costs us everything.

This love is costly, yes, but it is the way of living in eternal life NOW, the best life on earth possible NOW.

In Deuteronomy, Moses promises that following God's commands is the way of life and what's good.

The promise is that loving God and doing God's will be a source of life, of goodness and abundance for God's people.

1 John says the same thing, that we are to love our brothers and sisters – not in words and speech but in action and truth.

How each one of us does this is our call, our vocation, our vocation is how we put the Holy Spirit's gifts to each of us to work.

In Christ, we are given the freedom to live into our vocation and we are not to let the limiting structures of culture stop us.

This new commandment – to love one another as Christ loves us – is the cornerstone of our Christian faith.

If we forget it, we are worshipping some other small-G god, which is the way to death and to all that's wrong in Creation.

We have been given a wonderful gift to help us remember always  
that we are to love our brothers and sisters 24/7/365  
through the inspiration and talents of Good Shepherd's Quilters.

On the wall above the choir is a gorgeous quilt with the name of "538 Love Messages." Why 538?

Because in one English translation of the Bible,  
the word “love” is used 538 times:

<sup>2</sup> 317 in the Hebrew Bible and 221 in the New Testament.<sup>2</sup>

The quilt is composed of 538 hand-cut squares, and no two are the same.

In their description of their gift of love,

the quilters say: *The various colors around the multicolored heart represent people of the world comprised of different races, creeds, sexual orientations and religions.*

*These differing people come together in love  
in the central heart of this quilt.*

This quilt will be present in our church for most of the year  
to be a witness to this parish's dedication to God's will,  
this community as an outpost of the Reign of God  
where all people are welcome, where we come as we  
are to join with our brothers and sisters.

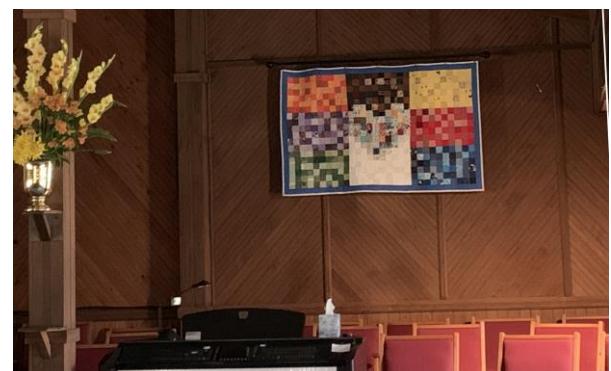
This is a place where we aspire to live in a world  
where all creation thrives in God's love,  
and to become who God created us to be  
by worshipping joyfully, respecting all,  
sharing generously, and nurturing every spirit.

Here's the best news of all: God has already given us everything we need to do this work of love!

God's giving knows no ending, and nothing –  
not even death – can stop God  
from bringing all creation into the blessings of peace.

So, actually, it turns out I don't have to hate you after all. Whew.

Instead, I rejoice that God has created a Christian family here, in this place, chock full of beautiful daughters and sons who love each other in action and in truth. I hope you already know this, but the truth is: I REALLY love all y'all!



<sup>2</sup> <https://www.reference.com/art-literature/many-times-love-mentioned-bible-f8eb228f4fe0a4>

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### **COLLECT OF THE DAY**

Direct us, O Lord God, in all our doings with your continual help, that in all our works, begun, continued, and ended in you, we may glorify your holy name; and finally, by your mercy, bring us to everlasting life, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

### **DEUTERONOMY 30:15–20**

Look here! Today I've set before you life and what's good versus death and what's wrong. If you obey the Lord your God's commandments that I'm commanding you right now by loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments, his regulations, and his case laws, then you will live and thrive, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you refuse to listen, and so are misled, worshipping other gods and serving them, I'm telling you right now that you will definitely die. You will not prolong your life on the fertile land that you are crossing the Jordan River to enter and possess. I call heaven and earth as my witnesses against you right now: I have set life and death, blessing and curse before you. Now choose life—so that you and your descendants will live—by loving the Lord your God, by obeying his voice, and by clinging to him. That's how you will survive and live long on the fertile land the Lord swore to give to your ancestors: to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."

### **PSALM 1**

Happy are they who have not walked in the counsel of the wicked, nor lingered in the way of sinners,  
nor sat in the seats of the scornful!

**Their delight is in the law of the LORD, and they meditate on his law day and night.**

They are like trees planted by streams of water, bearing fruit in due season, with leaves that do not wither;  
everything they do shall prosper.

**It is not so with the wicked; they are like chaff which the wind blows away.**

Therefore, the wicked shall not stand upright when judgment comes, nor the sinner in the council of the righteous.

**For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked is doomed.**

### **1 JOHN 3:13–19**

Don't be surprised, brothers and sisters, if the world hates you. We know that we have transferred from death to life, because we love the brothers and sisters. The person who does not love remains in death. Everyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that murderers don't have eternal life residing in them. This is how we know love: Jesus laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. But if someone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but refuses to help—how can the love of God dwell in a person like that?

Little children, let's not love with words or speech but with action and truth. This is how we will know that we belong to the truth and reassure our hearts in God's presence.

### **LUKE 14:25–33**

Large crowds were traveling with Jesus. Turning to them, he said, "Whoever comes to me and doesn't hate father and mother, spouse and children, and brothers and sisters—yes, even one's own life—cannot be my disciple. Whoever doesn't carry their own cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."

If one of you wanted to build a tower, wouldn't you first sit down and calculate the cost, to determine whether you have enough money to complete it? Otherwise, when you have laid the foundation but couldn't finish the tower, all who see it will begin to belittle you. They will say, 'Here's the person who began construction and couldn't complete it!' Or what king would go to war against another king without first sitting down to consider whether his ten thousand soldiers could go up against the twenty thousand coming against him? And if he didn't think he could win, he would send a representative to discuss terms of peace while his enemy was still a long way off. In the same way, none of you who are unwilling to give up all of your possessions can be my disciple."

### **SERMON HYMN: God, Whose Giving Knows No Ending**

**BLESSING:** Beloved, life is short, and we do not have much time to gladden the hearts of those who travel with us, so be quick to love and make haste to be kind. As you leave this place, the blessing of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit be upon you and remain with you, now and forever. Amen.