

PEACE WITH ENEMIES

Peace with enemies.

An enemy is the source of a perceived or real threat,..... and it's not necessarily someone or ones that are bad or that we don't like.

Usually, with some exception, we come to regard an enemy as bad and worthy of hate so that we can do violence against them.

Today's text opens with the very telling statement:

the king of Aram was at war with Israel; telling because it truly is the kings who do war. The common person usually does not want war, until brain washed. More often than not, kings/the powerful form enemies.

As the story goes, the king of Aram met secretly with his advisors and generals, and decided to move their army in order to set a trap.

However, "The man of God"—Elisha somehow found out and warned the king of Israel to inform all to be on alert about that place.

The king of Aram realized that the Israelites were aware of his deployment, and was livid because he thought there was a traitor in his midst who must have warned his enemy.

His generals assured him that no one deceived him, and that it was the Israeli prophet Elisha who informed the king of Israel.

The king told his generals to find out where Elisha was and then take the army and kill him.

As it turns out, Elisha was in the city of Dothan, which is north of Samaria—outside of Israeli control.

The Aramean army moved in at night and surrounded Dothan.

In the morning, Elisha's servant was in a panic, but Elisha told him to not be afraid because the hills around Dothan are filled with horses and chariots of fire that would protect them.

When the Arameans started their attack, Elisha prayed that God would make them all blind, and there became blind.

NOW they were weak. The power was taken away from the enemy.

Cleverly, Elisha went to the blind soldiers, without revealing who he was, and said, "Oh dear me, you are in the wrong place. Let me lead you to where you need to be, and there you will see the man that you seek.

And, so Elisha led the Arameans to..... Samaria, which was controlled by Israel and where the king of Israel was, too.

Once there, Elisha prayed that God would "open" their eyes, and their eyes were opened.

They saw Elisha,and they saw where they were.

Those who once tried to set a trap, now were in a trap.

The king of Israel eagerly asked Elisha, "Can I kill them? I can kill them? [it's twice in the Bible]

Again, very telling..... the kings talk tough, but it is the common person who has to do the dirty work.

Elisha informed his king that the king's way of brute force did not create this lovely situation, and so he is not allowed to mess things up with violence.

Elisha surprised all by telling his king to prepare a huge feast for the captive Arameans, and then said, "When they had their fill, then they can freely go home."

The less powerful Aramean army was transformed by this kindness, and they went home and told their king what had happened.

The king of Aram had a change of heart, and the Arameans did not do war anymore against Israel.

This is a wonderful example of **making peace with enemies**, but the wonder is more in the details than the result of happy, sated Arameans.

Because of the king, the Aramean army became an enemy to Israel and especially to Elisha. They were a real and powerful threat.

Elisha didn't act like a wimp and beg his enemy with flowers and a plea for mercy.

Elisha didn't blame them, nor did he defend himself.

He didn't regard them as misunderstood, misguided victims.

He didn't necessary like them.

>We don't have to like our enemies to love them.<

When threatened with violence, Elisha did not call 911 or beg his king to counterattack.

Our animalistic instinct is to run from a threat or to fight violence with violence,.... which, if you think about it, is stupid.

For ex.in 2007, the Polish immigrant, Robert Dziekanski was acting violently. Vancouver airport officials felt threatened, so they called the RCMP.

The frighten, confused immigrant ended up dead.

One RCMP officer, defensively said, off the record, "What do you expect when you call us. We bring brute force to a situation. We are not therapists.

The fight reflex / violence attempts to destroy the problem / the threat, yet problems must be solved.

They can't be out run or destroyed.

Elisha, turned to God for help... with a very clever idea for de-powering his enemy.

It is prudent and necessary to remove power from an enemy.

Enemies are a lot easier to deal with when they are of equal power; moreover, only as equals can two parties reach a just solution.

Strangely, kings / political leaders tend to **empower** their enemies by labelling them, enabling them or engaging them.

President Bush labelled his enemies the "Axis of Evil." In 2002, the Dutch had a plan to de-power Saddam by ignoring him, and dealing only with moderates in Iraq.

That plan was not selected,.....instead hundreds of thousands of people have died,.... and trillions of dollars wasted.... trying to destroy a threat that existed only in the minds of the leaders.

Interestingly, Elisha turned to God for help. He didn't ask his king. In fact, he restrained his king.

Political leaders limit their options for solving international threats to only dealing with other leaders / by only using "their" system.

Great Britain and other countries tried to appease Hitler and his Nazi party, and in doing so, they empowered them.

They could have tried to connect with the good German people, yet... I suppose,..... debasing political power goes both ways, and they'd rather have war then surrender their own power base.....

By trick, deception and blindness.....Elisha's enemies were made less powerful.

Then he did a "Transforming initiative" to give them a reason to change.

They were partially disarmed and transformed, and that is how to make peace with enemies.

In other words, connect on level ground and offer a reason / opportunity to change.

Elisha's tactics were proactive, bold and aggressive, and that is okay, and often necessary.

He loved his enemies by saving them from war.

He loved his enemies by exposing the lies and propaganda that their king had feed them. Elisha gave them "real" food.

And, he loved his king by saving him from doing violence, too.

He "Got in the way."

De-powering / removing power can happen in many ways, including taking away an enemies reason to be threatening or catching them when they are weak.

I told the following personal story eight years ago. If some of you remember it, then you can day dream for a minute or two,..... but keep your eyes open!

It's a story about turning my enemy into a friend, and George was a very large, strong threat.

I guess I was pretty naive during my first year at university when I met George. Now, keep in mind this was a while ago, back in the early 70's, and at that time, in the US, there was still a fair amount of racial tension, and George was black (which was the PC designation at that time).

In fact George was a militant Black, and a member of a radical Black fraternity, call Alpha Phi Alpha. They weren't recognized by the university, so George lived in a Dorm, the room next to mine.

As it happened, one day, I made the mistake of fooling around and ignorantly teasing one of his *brothers*. I was from Canada, and I didn't know the rules on how to interact with Blacks.

George saw the interaction and intervened for his honour.

He commenced to do physical harm to my body, in spite of my gushing apology.

George was very huge "incredible hulk huge!"

I responded as any nice, middle class church kid would, and said, “okay, I quit; you win.” George, was sitting and bouncing on my folded in two body, as he yelled back, “What’s this, ‘I quit’ stuff; this ain’t the suburbs.”

Fortunately, before my back was broken, others arrived to my rescue, and restrained George. I again offered my apologies, but George answered with the threat, “I’ll get you,” as he walked away.

The next few weeks were very harrowing, full of close calls and intimidating threats. And, to each one, I would respond, “George, let’s work this out; I want to be your friend.” On one occasion, I was playing pool at the student centre. George snuck up behind me as I was aiming for a shot, and broke a cue stick over my back.

I WAS silent after that encounter.

Finally, not long after that, I was in the dorm, one afternoon, and it was very quiet and empty. I walked into the dorm washroom, and was greeted with “**Whoever is there get out of here NOW.**”

Low and behold it was George, all alone, and very occupied in one of the stalls. Apparently, George had a personal phobia about using the toilet in public. He liked his privacy.

By pure luck or by divine intervention, George was temporarily “weak.”

I walked up to the stall’s door, and said, “George, It’s me, Gordon, and I want to be your friend.”

I can’t repeat what he said, but the essence was – a warning to leave or he’d send me to a very hot place..

I stood firm and replied that I wouldn’t leave until we were friends. This banter went on for a couple of minutes: George’s screaming threats and my petitions, until George, suddenly, in an uncommonly quite voice asked, “Why do you want to be my friend.”

I answered, “I was taught that God wants us to love everybody, and I’m trying to; I want to; I want to be your friend.”

Again, in a small voice he replied, “Will you leave, if I promise to be your friend?”

“I said, “The washroom is yours.”

We became the best of friends. His name is George Dixon.

I learned that day, that it may take time and effort, and creatively taking advantage of someone’s weakness.. to befriend an enemy, but it is possible, and it is worth it.

In addition, George had a job as a bouncer. It’s good to be friends with a bouncer.

If I had more time, I could share some of the countless stories, from history, about how peace was made with enemies by connecting as equals and doing transforming initiatives.

Most of the stories are not widely known, because kings thrive on the power of brute force, and mostly promote the violent narratives, such as the Boston Tea Party.

For example, missing in the history books is how the fair people of Philadelphia responded to the new tax on tea. I'm safe to say that Philadelphia's attitude was influenced by the Quakers and nearby Mennonites.

Instead of choosing destruction, the people of Philadelphia persuaded Samuel Ayres, the captain of a British ship loaded with tea, to take his cargo back to England, and they gave him wages and supplies for his return trip.

A strong, peaceful statement was made about the tea tax; however, and sadly,..... violence tends to be louder..... because we too often listen as an animal instead of as a child of God.

Animals are wired to fight or run from threats. They learn and remember past experiences with enemies, and then automatically respond in the same manner when similar signals are received. It's basic "conditioned response", and it serves them well,... until a new threat comes along.

But, that's the best they can do; however, as humans,.... I think we can do better.

We can use our brains. We can think creatively, and we can use's God's input, too.

Instead of living in a world of fear, of good guys and bad guys, of winners and losers, and the myth of destroying threats, God invites us to learn / to embrace another way. The way of solving problems and of transforming enemies.

God wants to save us from losing / from dying, and so through love, God invites us and empowers us to strive to make peace with our enemies.

Pursuing peace is the journey of salvation. It is the path of love. It is God's way. It is the Gospel message,...as Jesus lived and taught.

And,..... the truth is that God's way.... is not easy

People may ridicule you for not supporting the way of violence and brute force.... **and** for not bowing down to the ways of our king.

Your inner animal voice may scream at you for not running or fighting back.

You may feel like a patsy for offering your enemy a transforming initiative..... in order to take away his anger.

And, fellow church members may gossip behind your back when you don't act like a helpless mouse, but instead you boldly and aggressively confront your enemies with sly manoeuvring to take away his power over you.

Moreover, the truth also includes the fact that we can't control other people. We can't **make** them change and cease to be a threat.

Our best efforts may fail, just as the violent alternative always does.

Nevertheless, there is more at stake than merely avoiding capture from a threatening army.....or turning a bully into a friend.

The enemy is what threatens us: What makes us afraid and what is destroying us.

We can't out run our demons,..... nor can we simply, through sheer will power or with brute force, defeat them, either.

Our only hope is to try to make peace with our enemies, and that begins and ends with love.

For many of us, we are ..ourown worst enemy..... because,.... we fail to be gracious and loving to ourselves.

Perhaps, it is because our trust is in illusions and destructive expectations,..... or maybe..... we are convinced that we are too weak...and not worthy of love including God's love.

It's very hard, almost impossible to deal with an enemy who is stronger, and finding equality with an enemy may actually mean discovering our own power.

Maybe, a transforming initiative is necessary for ourselves.
Perhaps,..... we need more love!

And, erase that notion that love is a bouquet of flowers or a warm fuzzy emotion.

Love is our hope and salvation. It is the way of Christ, and love is very powerful and smart. Moreover, love gives life and brings peace, and that could include telling our king to back off..... or.... tricking an enemy for the good of all.

God gave us the lesson of this episode with Elisha,..... and God gave us Jesus to show us the way. And, realize that Elisha used his God given brain to come up with a creative ploy,... and Elisha understood that he was worthy of God's love and protection.

And, also take note that Elisha didn't hide and expect God to destroy his problem for him. He had to personally go to his enemy at great risk, trusting God was doing God's part,.....and walk with them.... taking them to a different place..... a place to be transformed.

Our journey.....may include walking through dark valleys in our pursuit to peace / to salvation.

Will we be okay???? Will we will find peace???
??????

That all depends on the depth and expanse of our love.
And, God is love.