

When Love Isn't Fun

A Gospel Reflection by Brian Wigger

Last Friday was St. Valentine's Day, a day (weekend) to celebrate love. Tens of millions of cards were no doubt exchanged, decorated with bright red hearts. People consumed millions of pieces of chocolate and billions of little candy hearts inscribed with romantic messages. With hearts and flowers abounding, some celebrated the joys of love. Isn't love wonderful?

No, not always. Sometimes love is one of the hardest challenges of life. Love, real love, can lead us to do that which we would never choose, except for our belief that is right to love.

This weekend our Gospel asks us to consider what Jesus says: "*But to you who are willing to listen, I say love your enemies! Do good to those who hate you.*" Is that wonderful? Oh, to be sure, stories of this kind of love can be inspirational. But that is in hindsight. If you've ever tried to do what Jesus says and love your enemies, you know how hard this can be.

Notice that Jesus is not calling to have warm, fuzzy feelings for our enemies. Loving our enemies means doing good to those who hate us. It means actually treating them with kindness and mercy. Love of this sort is far more than sending them Valentine's Day cards or red roses. Rather, it's sacrificial, self-denying choice to seek what's best for those who do not seek the best for us.

In fact, they might very well want to hurt us. Yet we're to do good to them according to Jesus.

I know, for me, this passage raises all sorts of complicated ethical questions. There is a time and place for serious conversation about what it means to love enemies in the perplexing realities of our lives and in our current world. But, we are challenged (asked) to let the command of Jesus sink into our hearts, without letting our brain blunt its sharp edge. I want to consider my relationships, and whether I'm following the command of Jesus or not. I want to be one of those who is "*willing to listen,*" as Jesus says (6:27), so that I might hear what God is saying to me.

We have the opportunity to ask: How do you respond to Jesus' call to love your enemies? Have you ever acted in the obedience to this instruction? When? What happened? Is Jesus calling you to love someone in your life in a new way today?