

1.23.2022 Epiphany 3 (Romans 12:16-21)

*“Recompense to no man evil for evil... Avenge not yourselves... If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink... Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.”*

These inspired words found in our Epistle this morning demonstrate the great divide that exists between the faithful Christian life and fallen human nature. These words are a clear indication that every Christian is in the midst of a great battle. On one side of this battle are all those things that seem to come so naturally to our flesh, like repaying evil for evil or avenging ourselves, and on the other side is that which God instructs His people to do, telling us that if your enemy hungers, feed him, if he thirsts, give him drink, to be not overcome by evil, but to overcome evil with good. In this world we are in the midst of a great battle, with the sinful, selfish desires of the flesh on one side, and the gracious, God-given gifts of the Spirit on the other.

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When we consider the words we read this morning, we find they not only describe our daily struggle to live the life God has called us to, but we also recognize that these words were written for our benefit, and for our instruction. They were written, you might say, to help us, in the midst of this conflict, to wage war against fallen human nature, to help us wage war *“not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places”* (Ephesians 6:12).

These words were written to help us wage war against fallen human nature, and they tell us the method of our warfare is twofold. First, we are told, be not overcome by evil. In this great battle, do not be defeated by any injury you suffer at the hand of another. Do not lower your defenses by reaching down to pick up a stone that you may repay evil for evil. Do not abandon your position on the battlefield by stepping out to avenge yourself, but instead, in the words of St. Paul, *“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil... Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above*

*all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:11; 14-17).*

Be not overcome by evil, and be not overcome by the evil one. Put on the whole armor of God, not that you may avenge yourself, but by the grace of God that you may stand, in His power and under His protection, and defend yourself against the wiles of the devil. The people of God repay no man evil for evil, and avenge not ourselves, because we know that those who are tricked by the Enemy into doing so are not the conquerors, but the conquered.

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To stand boldly against the wiles of the devil, to faithfully resist his schemes, this is the first method of our warfare in the great battle against fallen human nature, but it is not enough to *be not overcome by evil*, we must also *overcome evil with good*. We must not only stop the hand that is reaching down to pick up a stone to throw at our enemy, we must also find some good that hand may do for our enemy. St. James gives us this pattern to follow as we combat the forces of evil. He writes, *“Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you” (James 4:7-8).*

The pattern is: *Resist the devil... Draw near to God...* We resist the devil by turning away from the temptation he places before us to avenge ourselves, and we draw near to God by turning toward the opportunity He gives us to overcome evil with good. This pattern of resisting the devil and his schemes, and drawing near to God through some positive act is exactly what our Lord calls His people to do in the Sermon on the Mount. In that sermon Jesus didn't talk about inaction, He didn't say avoid, ignore, or just forget that you have enemies. No. He said, *“Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you” (Matthew 5:44).* And Why? *“That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven...” (Matthew 5:45).*

The children of God are not overcome by evil, the children of God overcome evil with good, and the only-begotten Son of God is the perfect example of that eternal truth. When our Lord faced the problem of evil and the terrible

effects of sin, He didn't use His Omnipotent power to repay evil for evil, He overcame evil with good. He lived a life of perfect holiness, obedience, and active benevolence unlike the world has ever seen. He answered hate with love. He confronted sin with righteousness. He overcame evil with good. Now He calls you, and all who call themselves Christians, to confront and overcome evil as He did, with holiness, righteousness and compassion; in patience, humility, and love.

Living this life as our Lord did, living this life as a disciple of His doesn't come easily to our fallen human nature. We are in the midst of a great battle, a battle that we cannot win in our own strength, but only in the presence and power of God, and to prove that God does provide us with His grace and His strength to overcome evil with good, I'll leave you with this story of a daughter's tribute to her dad:

Richard Houston was a twenty-one year veteran of the police department in Mesquite, Texas who was fatally shot on December 3rd while responding to a domestic dispute. Officer Houston received forty-eight letters of commendation during his career, two Life Saving Awards, and one police commendation bar, but his greatest achievement was his devotion to our Lord. Mesquite's Assistant Chief of Police stated that Officer Houston "walked with God each day."

His eighteen-year-old daughter, whose name is Shelby, modeled her father's faithful devotion to our Lord with a tribute at his funeral. At one point during her speech she stated: "I remember having conversations with my dad about him losing friends and officers in the line of duty. I have heard all the stories you can think of, but I've always had such a hard time with how the suspect is dealt with. Not that I didn't think there should be justice served, but my heart always ached for those who don't know Jesus—their actions being a reflection of that.

"I was always told that I would feel differently if it happened to me. But as it's happened to my own father, I think I still feel the same. There has been anger, sadness, grief, and confusion. And part of me wishes I could despise the man who did this to my father. But I can't get any part of my heart to hate him.

"All that I can find is myself hoping and praying for this man to truly know Jesus. I thought this might change if the man continued to live. But when I

heard the news that he was in stable condition, part of me was relieved. My prayer is that someday down the road, I'd get to spend some time with the man who shot my father, not to scream at him, not to yell at him, not to scold him. Simply to tell him about Jesus."

The same Spirit who lives in Shelby, the same Spirit who gave her the grace and strength overcome evil with good, lives in you. If, in her most difficult circumstance, she can overcome evil with good, then can't we *love* and *bless* and *do good* and *pray for* those who hurt us? Will you follow Shelby's example as she follows the example of Jesus? Will you imitate her as she imitates Christ? (1 Corinthians 11:1) Will you overcome evil with good?