

Friend-turned-Enemy

A message based on

Psalm 55

Followers of Jesus:

I want to tell you a story I read and told about in my very first church back in the 1990s. It's a true story about a farmer. A young pastor was chatting with one of the people in the congregation. The tone of the man turns into a let-me-tell-you-what's-really-going-on-here tone. He tries not to be obvious, but he says to the pastor, "You see that man over there? He got drunk, drove his tractor through my fence, into my garden, over my almost-ready-to-be-harvested vegetables!" Well, the pastor later that week went to pay that terrible farmer a visit!

Do you know what the pastor discovered? The event *had taken place twelve years ago!* Yet, if he were to believe the telling of it, it happened just last week!

How many of us could tell the same sort of story? We take someone aside, like we do, and tell them, "Watch out for that guy! He..." and then we tell the tale in a way that makes the other look very bad indeed. "Watch out for that woman! She said..." and then we say on what once was said by her in a way that makes it seem she is beyond salvation. When we do that sort of thing, what does that make us? I suppose we could come up with all kinds of words for it, but I want to direct our attention to what God says. It is written in the New Testament, the testimony about how we as human beings treat others in inhumane ways. It is the truth about our behaviour, and it doesn't look good.

They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant, and boastful (Rom 1:29-30).

What it makes us, according to God, is gossips and slanderers and God-haters.

Why? Why is it that we handle our pain like this? Why, when we get hurt by someone, wounded, do we lash out by looking for someone who will agree with us, complain to them, and have them assure us that we have very good reasons for feeling the way we do? It feels good for a while. We sort of feel vindicated. Here's the question, however. Does it really help to complain to someone else about what someone did or said to or about us? Has it brought healing to us?

We have seen in our study of the psalms of lament that in them God is inviting us into an honest conversation with him. He will not give permission for us to pretend that everything is all right, when it is not all right. He wants to know: what are we really thinking? What really is going on in our hearts? So we read here in this psalm of David. David is being honest.

**Let death take my enemies by surprise;
let them go down alive to the grave, for evil finds lodging among
them (Ps 55:15).**

Wait just one minute here! Aren't we as followers of Jesus supposed to love our enemies? What kind of wish is this that David is giving, that he wishes his enemies would die a sudden, unexpected death? Is this really all right to say?

**But you, O God, will bring down the wicked
into the pit of corruption;
bloodthirsty and deceitful men will not live out half their days (Ps
55:23).**

Is it really a good thing to wish that our enemies not live out a full, long life? Again, is it really ok to want our enemies dead?

I remember talking to someone in a previous congregation about this whole notion in the psalms about having enemies. "I don't have any enemies," he said. I didn't know what to say! In this psalm David is having trouble with a particular kind of enemy, with someone who had become his enemy. He is

writing about someone who used to be his friend. What a sad state that is, to have to admit, “He used to be my friend, but no more.”

**If an enemy were insulting me, I could endure it;
if a foe were raising himself against me, I could hide from him.
But it is you, a man like myself, my companion, my close friend,
with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship
as we walked with the throng at the house of God (Ps 55:12-14).**

In the very next verse, he writes what I quoted before about death taking his enemies by surprise. At first David sees that the man was not his enemy. If it was so, he could handle that. Then he observes that it was someone he knew quite well. “You are just like me,” he writes. “I know how you think, I know what you like and don’t, we’ve had some really intense conversations.” He was David’s *companion*. He was David’s *close friend* who used to (to put it in our day), go to church with him. We sat in the same pew. We sang the LORD’s songs. We talked together about the passage that was read that morning, spoke about how the message touched our hearts and challenged us, or encouraged us, or admonished us.

We’re talking about pretty hurtful stuff. To deal with it properly we must first admit it for what it is: it hurts! A lot!

David in this psalm complains, but he does not complain to someone else, some other human being who might take his side. What David does is bring his complaint to God, *but does not bring it up in any conversation he might have with his fellow human beings*. He brings it to God. He pours out his heart to God. He doesn’t hold it in. He lets it out. He tells God he wishes his friend-turned- enemy were dead. He tells how he wishes his former friend's life would be cut short.

**Listen to my prayer, O God,
do not ignore my plea; hear me and answer me.
My thoughts trouble me and I am distraught
at the voice of the enemy; for they bring down suffering upon me
and revile me in their anger (Ps 55:1-3).**

David sees that his thoughts are troubling him. He is distraught because of what his friend-turned-enemy has said to or about him. How it hurt! How it brought him suffering! He speaks of how when his former friend became angry at him, what that anger did to his soul. How deeply it wounded him!

**My heart is in anguish within me; the terrors of death assail me.
Fear and trembling have beset me; horror has overwhelmed me (Ps
55:4-5).**

And he wanted to run away, get away from all the mess he was in, flee far from the conflict.

He cries out to God. And he pleads with God to take care of his enemy for him.

**But I call out to God, and the LORD saves me.
Evening, morning and noon I cry out in distress,
and he hears my voice.
He ransoms me unharmed from the battle waged against me,
even though many oppose me.
God, who is enthroned forever, will hear them and afflict them –
men who never change their ways and have no fear of God (Ps
55:16-19).**

In this David is saying, “God, save me from my own need for revenge. LORD, I want to hurt them so bad because they hurt me so bad, but I know that’s not my place. It is yours to avenge, yours to repay.”

He also means, “Save me from my hate of this former friend. Move me to love my neighbour as myself, because I can’t do it right now. It hurts too much.” The Bible calls this process, “sanctification.” It’s the process of being made holy. God is not giving us permission to remain angry and hurt by our friends. He is showing us how to deal with our pain. He is inviting us to share it with him, and find healing from in through our Savior Jesus Christ.