

RISING GENERATIONS

THE UPPER ROOM

Loving Enemies: Living for God's Kingdom

Anne Crumpler

The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5–7 is about the kingdom of God, a new way of living that God promises for the world. The kingdom of God is characterized by God's justice, righteousness, peace, and unfaltering love.

Jesus speaks about the difference between the world as it is—the values, customs, ways of thinking that shape our lives—and the world God promises. In the scripture, “You have heard that it was said . . .” describes the way of the world. “But I say to you . . .” is God's way.

The sermon is about individual relationships; it is also about social, political, and economic issues. Jesus speaks to the crowd, but he also addresses nations. After all, the kingdom of God is a promise for all the world.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbors and hate your enemies.’”

We understand how this works. We divide people into friends and enemies. We collect friends on Facebook; we block enemies. We love our friends and go out of our way to spend time with them. Enemies—not so much! The same is true on a larger scale: Think of groups of people who can't get along or of nations labeled “friend” or “enemy.” The ways of the world are a far cry from the ways of God. A society defined by friends and enemies is not a world of steadfast love.

“But I say to you, ‘Love your enemies.’”

How do we begin? Honestly, we sometimes wonder why we should even try. But occasionally, we see glimpses of God's love in our world:

- A seventh grader refuses to fight, no matter how much he's taunted.
- A cheerleader stops to help a computer geek pick up his books.
- An older woman, hobbling on a walker, compliments a teenager and asks about the tattoo on his shoulder.
- A church opens its doors to a changing neighborhood.

What would happen if nations decided to love their enemies? On Christmas Eve, 1914, German soldiers on the western front began singing Christmas carols and decorating their trenches. They lit candles and hung them on tiny trees. British soldiers on the hills nearby heard the singing and answered, singing the same songs in English. The celebration continued with shouted Christmas greetings and soldiers racing across No Man's Land to exchange gifts from home.

Why did it happen? No official truce stopped the fighting, but it did stop—and enemies became friends, if only for a day. Maybe someone heard an angel sing, “Peace on earth; good will to all.”

Jesus preaches about the kingdom of God, a whole new world based on God's steadfast no-strings-attached love, a human community in which all people are friends. Think about ways that you can witness to God's kingdom.

Dig Deeper

Reflect on Matthew 5:43–48. What images come to mind as you read? Why does Jesus tell us to love our enemies?

Prayer: Loving God: you have commanded us to love our enemies and to do good to those who hate us. Let us never be content to love only those who love us. Instead, give us strength to reach out in love and peace to all of your children; in Jesus' name. Amen.