

Jesus' Call to Love and United Mission
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When we are united in God's mission,
Our United Mission will grow.

“Love your enemies.”
Jesus, as recorded in Matthew 5:44

On first hearing or reading, Jesus' words to his disciples to “Love your enemies” seem ridiculous, almost preposterous. Why should we love our enemies? Is it even possible to love our enemies? Most of us struggle with these three words.

Tertullian, in the 2nd century, remarked how Christian love attracted pagan notice: "What marks us in the eyes of our enemies is our loving kindness. 'Only look,' they say, 'look how they love one another.'" (*Apology* 39)

Yet, we have seen it happen in three figures in the 20th century: Gandhi, King, and Mandela—persons of color from three different continents. Is this merely a matter of coincidence? I don't believe so. Each of them had known and personally experienced the hatred and brutality of racism.

In 1990 when Nelson Mandela emerged from 27 years in prison, he was not filled with hatred. Even more importantly when he came out, he called for reconciliation, understanding, and forgiveness. The *Washington Post* noted that although he was an old man by the time he took power in his country, and delegated much of the work of governing to others, the trust he had gained among people in just about every camp was essential in South Africa's transition from a racial dictatorship to a true democracy.

Because he loved his enemies, marvelous things happened, including the ending of *apartheid* as an official policy in South Africa. What followed was not a cure all, but the nation became a more just society.

Loving one's enemy is not easy anywhere, whether it is between individuals or among ethnic groups or nations. On this subject, M. Eugene Boring noted that Jesus' sayings express the inherent rule of the kingdom of God and are God's ultimate way of dealing with humanity, exhibited in the life and death of Jesus who went to the cross. It is not a matter of watering down Jesus' sayings and finding a meaning that seems reasonable, with which we can live. They are not to be made “reasonable.” Rather, we must understand that they violate the “common sense” of this world and point to another reality. They ask us whether we are oriented to the God who has redefined power and kingship in the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus of

Nazareth.

The message that we, as Jesus' disciples, are called to love our enemies is not easy to hear and to carry out. It seems to violate "common sense." Yet there it is, standing at the core of Jesus' teachings. How do we respond? We heed the call of Jesus' words in our congregations and our communities. We send American Baptist missionaries, home and abroad, to carry the message of God's love, our love for one another, and yes, even to our enemies. Let it be done!

A major way that American Baptist congregations can carry Jesus' command to love our enemies to all nations and peoples is to give generously and regularly to American Baptist United Mission.

Thank you for your support through American Baptist United Mission.

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