

With No Anti-Semitism at All

Luke 20:9-20

The Fifth Sunday in Lent, March 13, 2016

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

Anti-Semitism is hatred or opposition to anything Jewish. Palestinians in the Holy Land are called Anti-Semitic because of their opposition to the Israeli state. Iranians and other Muslims are called Anti-Semitic because of their opposition to the Israeli state.

Anti-Semitism is not limited to being opposed to the Israeli state. Any action taken against Jews is Anti-Semitic. If someone oppresses Jews they are an Anti-Semite. If someone refuses to hire Jews or think that Jews are somehow inferior, they are Anti-Semitic. If someone believes that Jews own everything and run everything behind the scenes, such a person is Anti-Semitic.

William Shatner in his book "Leonard" describes what it was like for him and Leonard Nimoy to grow up as Jews in North America. Shatner recalls going to Hebrew school by pretending to walk past the school on the opposite side of the street and then suddenly running across the street hoping that no one would see him go into the building where his Rabbi taught him Hebrew. He recalls people in his neighborhood calling him names because he is a Jew.

The classic Anti-Semite in Western Civilization is Adolf Hitler. Estimates indicate that Hitler had approximately 6 million Jews put to death in Nazi concentration camps. While there are some people who deny this number and some who even deny that Hitler put anyone to death, it is hard to ignore the evidence that has been uncovered after World War II ended. Hitler believed certain things about certain races. He had eugenics beliefs and he put them into practice by encouraging the prominence of the German people over the Jewish people.

Because Hitler was so cruel in his practices and because he was on the losing side in World War II, a war which he himself started, when people accuse other people in the United States of being an Anti-Semite it is particularly insulting. In the United States when someone accuses someone else of being an Anti-Semite, they may as well compare the person they are accusing to Adolf Hitler. And some people do compare other people to Adolf Hitler simply because they have done something that is perceived or genuinely is Anti-Semitic.

Now there are people who accuse the New Testament of being Anti-Semitic. The charge is ludicrous because with the exception of Saint Luke all of the New Testament authors are Jews themselves. Why one would accuse Jews of being against Jews is beyond me. But then there are people who believe that the New Testament was not written by the people that the New Testament claims wrote it, but that is a subject for a whole other sermon.

The reason that some people accuse the New Testament of being Anti-Semitic is because there are statements in the New Testament that are against the Jews. For example in Romans chapters nine through eleven Saint Paul states that he wishes that he could be cut off from Christ if it would save his fellow Jews. Such a statement assumes that the Jews are outside of salvation. Later he says that those Jews who do not believe in Jesus are cut off from Israel. Again there are people who say that such a statement is Anti-Semitic.

In John's Gospel on numerous occasions the opponents and enemies of Jesus are not called Pharisees or Sadducees. While John will use those terms the most prevalent word that John uses to refer to the opponents of Jesus is simply "the Jews."

This has led to the accusation against the Jews that they are “Christ killers.” The Jews complained about this accusation when Mel Gibson made his movie, “The Passion of the Christ.” While many in the Christian community complained that the movie was not Anti-Semitic in that it did not blame all Jews for the death of Jesus, but rather only those Jewish leaders who conspired against Him, it seems to me that many Christians have forgotten the murders that Christians have perpetrated upon the Jews and we used the fact that the Jews killed Jesus as an excuse for our murder. I do not blame the Jewish community for being concerned when the Christians start using the term “Christ killers.” If I were them, I would be worried too.

This then raises the question of fairness. It especially raises the question of fairness when it comes to God. Is God treating the Jewish nation fairly? This question is especially relevant when we remember the fact that the Jews so far as can be determined are the blood descendents of God’s chosen people Israel. They are blood descendents so far as they can prove of Abraham himself. We say that we are children of Abraham by faith. They say that they are children of Abraham by blood. Which is the greater claim and in the eyes of God, is that claim right?

And so Jesus tells us a parable to answer this question. There was a man who planted a vineyard and rented it out to some farmers. When the time came for the landlord to collect the fruit of his vineyard, he sent one of his slaves to the vineyard to collect its fruit. When the farmers saw the slave, instead of giving the landlord’s share of the fruit, they beat the slave and sent him away empty handed.

Now let us stop the parable right there. What should the landlord do at this point? If he were in our society he would have a right to sue to get his share. In other words once the farmers beat the first slave the landlord is within his rights to take legal action against them. But he does not.

He sends another slave. Apparently he figures that things can be worked out between him and his renters. He doesn’t seem to think that he needs the engines of justice to do anything for him at the moment. The renters treat the second slave shamefully and beat him also and return him to the landlord without any of the vineyard’s fruits.

If you were the landlord what would you do at this point? Would you sit around and simply allow your renters to treat you this way? Would you allow such renters to treat someone you sent to them in this manner? Wouldn’t you by now have taken legal action to get some justice?

But the landlord does not do that. He sends them a third slave. This slave they beat to the point of wounding him. He returns to the master injured. They have assaulted him and now there is evidence of the assault. What would you do if you were the master? Wouldn’t you have gone to the authorities with your hired man and shown them the evidence of the violence of your renters? And by now surely one of you is sitting on those pews thinking to yourself, “I would have gotten rid of the renters by now.”

But the landlord does not do that. He sends his son to the renters. He figures that they will respect his son. The landlord still does not appeal to justice even though he is far past justice taking his side, he still does not do it.

When the renters see the son coming, they figure that the landlord must be dead because if the landlord were living he would have come himself by now or sent the authorities to arrest them. Since the son has arrived they figure that if they kill the son they may make use of squatter’s rights in the ancient world and obtain the vineyard for themselves. The renters kill the son of the landlord. Now, I ask you, to what justice is the landlord entitled? Is he not entitled to see those renters executed and the vineyard given to someone else?

And so that is what has happened.

You have record of what has happened in the Old Testament.

God sent Elijah to Israel and King Ahab allowed his foreign queen to threaten his life. Elisha also was threatened with death by the king of Israel. They threatened Jeremiah's life. They killed Isaiah according to the Rabbis. They killed righteous Zechariah in the temple itself. Amos' life was threatened when he brought Israel the word of God. At numerous times throughout Israel's life the prophets were in hiding for fear of their lives. Israel repeatedly resented the Word of God by persecuting the prophets who brought them the word of God.

But God was patient in His justice. He did not destroy the nation right away. He knew that there were many in Israel who were still righteous. He did not wish to put to death the righteous with the wicked. In fact when Elijah was running away from Queen Jezebel because his life had been threatened he complained to God that he was the only righteous person left in Israel. God reminded him that there were seven thousand in Israel who were still loyal to Him.

So it is not that Israel as a whole was unjust or unrighteous or put to death those whom God sent to them. It was those who were in charge of Israel who did these things. And God in His patience finally sent His Son. God said to Himself, "They will respect My Son."

But rather than simply beat and persecute the Son as they did the prophets, they killed the Son. Not all Israel is responsible for the death of Jesus. The apostles themselves were Jews. To this day there are Jews who believe in Jesus and are saved. But the leadership of Israel put the Son to death. They did not give the landlord the fruit of the vineyard when He requested it.

But the stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces and everyone on whom it falls will be crushed.

And so the landlord has taken the vineyard away from those renters and given it others. Historically speaking together with a few Jews, that means that God has given the vineyard to us Gentiles. The Kingdom of God has passed to us and we are now in charge of the vineyard. This is a great privilege and a great mystery. We rejoice in the privilege of being made members of Israel and not just members, but for the most part being in charge of the vineyard.

But we Gentiles should not be arrogant toward Jews even the ones who do not believe because if the landlord expected fruit from the previous renters, He will expect fruit from the current ones as well.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.