

**Based on Romans 12:9-21**  
**Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost**

*Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

Essentially, Jesus left us just two commandments to follow; to love God with our whole selves and likewise to love our neighbors. When Jesus first mentioned these, he was asked who, exactly, qualifies as a neighbor which he answered with the parable of the Good Samaritan. In that parable, Jesus shows us that there is no one who is automatically disqualified from being a neighbor.

Neighbors aren't just people who act and think like we do, it is not reserved to people who believe like we do, nor is it limited only to people we like. One of the core teachings of Jesus is that every human is an intentionally created child of God, worthy of belovedness.

In this letter from Paul, the Apostle expands on the teaching of Jesus to love our neighbors. From this letter we also get a clearer understanding what it is Jesus means by love. For Jesus, love means a desire to see another thrive and to be willing to take meaningful action to make that happen. It also suggests something like a physician's hypocritical oath to "do no harm." In other words, beating someone until they behave in an acceptable way isn't really love because it fails the "do no harm" test.

Paul here also recognizes something important, which is that while there may be people out there who actively seek to do us harm, we are NOT to answer like with like. The Old Testament may include the adage "an eye for an eye," but the way of Jesus explicitly forbids this (Jesus says so in Matthew 5:38-42).

While I think that the call to resist evil includes self-defense on both the individual and

communal level as well as the levying of appropriate sentences for those who would undermine the community; the Christian scriptures are clear that we should in no ways be seeking to preemptively confront potential evil-doers or to seek vengeance for crimes and insults carried out against us.

Part of the good news of Jesus is that there is nothing this mortal world can do that God's love for us cannot overcome. We need no longer live in fear of what might be done to us because no shame, no injury, not even mortal death is enough to end us. God's final word for us is life, eternal, abundant life. We have been given this promise so that we can fearlessly and boldly live out Jesus' radical example of a life built on love for one another.