

“Our Glorious Defeat”

Third in a Lent series on John 15

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John 15:18-25

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If the world hates you, know that it hated me before it hated you. If the world owned you, the world would love you as its own. Because you are not owned by the world, but I have chosen you out of the world—therefore the world hates you. Remember what I said to you, ‘Servants are not greater than their master.’ If they hunt me, they will hunt you.

If they do what I say, they will do what you say. But they will do all these things to you because of who I am, because they do not know the One who sent me.

If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin. Now they have no excuse for their sin. Whoever hates me, hates my Father too. If I had not done among them the things that no one else did, they would not have sin. But now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. It was to keep what their law says: “They hated me for no good reason.”¹

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Well, that went downhill quickly!

Jesus has been teaching, and we’ve been listening, and it has been all about love. The love who is God! The Father loving the Son, the Son loving the Father, all held within the love of the Spirit. God the Trinity is love!

Love is for sharing. So in Jesus, God wraps us in that same divine love. He even invites us to be his friends. He shares his life and love with us, even as follow him, our Master, and Teacher, and Saviour who lays down his life for his beloved.

Jesus makes us his, so we become a community of God’s love. We are learning to share love together, acting with love for one another.

He calls us his “branch.” He is our Vine. We have to stay connected with him—his words, his promises, what he has done, his life, his love. We keep living in Jesus, and we will produce fruit.

Love is for sharing. So we spread like vine branches do. As we go, living Jesus’ love into the world, we bear fruit. More love!

So it’s love, love, love, love . . . then hate! *“If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you,”* Jesus says. What is Jesus talking about?

¹ I’ve adapted the NRSV translation.

This is strange to our way of thinking. We're not used to being hated for belonging to Jesus. Maybe ignored, but hated? Persecuted? We find it hard to imagine why we would be. How can love given out, bring hatred back?

I'm going to take time on Jesus' teaching here, because it's strange to us. Because it's Jesus, and so important, I'll just start today.

II

We need to unpack this word Jesus uses, "world." Let me do this step by step.

Step 1:

The Greek word here is *kosmos*. In the fullest sense, the *kosmos* is everything that God has created and is creating. The *kosmos* is all of nature, including all of us. The *kosmos* is good, very good. You're good, very good. God makes it with beauty and value. God loves the *kosmos*.

Step 2:

But Jesus uses "world" (*kosmos*) in another sense too. The *kosmos* is humanity in rebellion against God.

Think of it as the "world system." It's every individual, and every organization — families, communities, governments, religions, economies, societies. It's how things work. You hear folks talk about "systemic injustice." That's part of what we're talking about here. The *kosmos* is personal and social, individuals and systems, about each of us and about all of us together. And it's all a mess.

So often, this *kosmos*-system does not reflect God's love. It does not express God's truth. Far too often, it is ugly and destructive. It's not all completely bad. But it's all bent out of shape and damaged. Our ways of thinking are messed up. We devalue what is good, and pursue what is wrong. We harm ourselves, and we harm others, and this harm spills out into the rest of God's creation. We are all complicit in this. We are all hopelessly stuck in it, trapped. It's a spiritual power that includes all of us, and has hold over all of us.

So we have, first and foremost, the *kosmos* God makes. And we have the *kosmos* gone wrong. Jesus diagnoses what is wrong in us, and what is wrong in everything.

III

But, thanks be to God, Jesus does not end with the diagnosis. Listen to Step 3:

This world gone wrong, God still loves, as much as ever. You know what this means? That famous John 3:16:

God loved the kosmos so much, that God gave God's one and only Son, so that whoever trusts him will not perish but have life eternal. For God did not send his Son into the kosmos to condemn the kosmos, but to save the kosmos through the Son."

Great news. The best!

But there's step 4:

The *kosmos* that has rejected God and God's way of life, that's in rebellion against God, that's mentally messed up and spiritually twisted in a knot . . . what does it do when it is encountered by God? By God in person, God the Son, the perfect embodiment of God's life and love? Jesus?

Jesus provokes a crisis in the *kosmos*.

As much as anyone I've heard of, Henri Nouwen lived and wrote with the love and gentleness of Jesus. Listen to this, because I think he gets at this crisis Jesus provokes:

Jesus Christ, the favorite Child of God, is persecuted. He who is poor, gentle, mourning; he who hungers and thirsts for uprightness; is merciful, pure of heart, and a peacemaker is not welcome in this world. The Blessed One of God is a threat to the established order and a source of constant irritation to those who consider themselves the rulers of this world.

Without accusing anyone he is considered an accuser, without condemning anyone he makes people feel guilty and ashamed, without his judging anyone those who see him feel judged. In their eyes, he cannot be tolerated and needs to be destroyed, because letting him be seems like a confession of guilt.²

We are so used to the way we are, and the way things are. Then we encounter perfect Love. We see ourselves reflecting poorly, compared to that image. So we respond. We have to. It's a crisis. Either we embrace Jesus, trust him, and begin the journey of him changing us. Or, we push him away, because we don't like what we see. We suppose it's him we fear. Really, it's ourselves.

² Henri J. M. Nouwen, Bread for the Journey (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1997), May 23-31.

That helps me understand this perplexing thing Jesus said:

If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin. Now they have no excuse for their sin. Whoever hates me hates my Father too. If I had not done among them the things that no one else did, they would not have sin. But now they have seen and hated both me and my Father.

The *kosmos* in rebellion against God . . . it reacts to Jesus. It rejects him. It expels him. We react. We reject. We expel Jesus.

IV

But God is good! God is love. So God is faithful, and God is persistent, and so with all of God's grace, and God's power . . . Step 5:

The *kosmos* that rejects Jesus, is gloriously defeated by Jesus, through its very rejection of Jesus.³

This is the wonder of the Cross. By every standard we can possibly conceive of, death on a cross is the absolute defeat of the person who is crucified. They've lost. Stripped of everything, even their own humanity. Rejected. Tossed aside from human company. Hoisted up for humiliation. Mounted for mockery. Shamed. Everyone turns away from them. Tortured, yes. Their own God-given body gets turned against them. Helpless and hopeless. And, as if almost an afterthought, killed. Once crucified, there is no coming down or coming back. It's over. They're done for. Defeated. Absolutely rejected. That's what crucifixion was all about.

By all appearances, Jesus looked like just another loser, done in by the world-system, the *kosmos*. Goodbye and good-riddance (though there is nothing good about it).

Except . . . it's God! Doing this to Jesus — us, the *kosmos*, we're all in this together — we did it to God.

We're in trouble now, right! We've lost, terribly.

Nope. Well, we've lost . . . wonderfully.

Because it is God. God loves the *kosmos*. And God's ways are not our ways.

So Jesus' death is our new life. Jesus' condemnation is us forgiven. Jesus' shame is

³ I've paraphrased a quote by Richard Bauckham, cited in Michael J. Gorman, [Abide and Go: Missional Theosis in the Gospel of John](#) (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2018), 106.

our glory. Jesus is rejected, and we are accepted. Jesus seems defeated by the *kosmos* and it is the *kosmos*' rebellion against God—our alienation from God—that is gloriously defeated.

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So why the hatred? If this is such strange and wonderfully good news, why does Jesus talk about his people being hated? And what does that have to do with us?

Remember, I said I'm just starting today. We have more steps to take.

This is a good place to pause, though. The most important place. Jesus has won, and so has the world, the true, God-made, wonderful and beautiful and good *kosmos*. So even hatred cannot have the last word. Even in our world today, hate cannot win!

Thanks be to God, through Jesus our Friend. Amen.