Daily Devotional, June 24, 2020   Love Your Enemies—Even on Facebook?

43 "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor[a] and hate your enemy.' 44 But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. Matthew 5:23-24 (NIV)

About 4 years ago, I decided social media which I mostly avoided, was maybe not such a bad thing after all. This became particularly true when I discovered I could stay in touch with my adult son even though he now lived thousands of miles away. Through platforms such as We Chat and Messenger, he posts pictures of what he and his fiancé are doing, or we are able to see each other through video calls, and it makes me feel like I am right there with them. I also discovered how social media helped me re-connect with old friends who I'm sure I would never have heard from again were it not for social media. What could be bad about this amazing new technological innovation?

It didn't take me long to remember why I had previously shied away from the use of social media-why I have this love/hate relationship with it. On the one hand I love how it connects me to family and old friends, but it also is a source of great division in our country. There must be thousands of fake articles posted on social media each day. Articles that tend to divide us and often times affirm viewpoints based on false information. Many of us have probably figured out that if you see an unsolicited article online it's probably not true, yet many people read and believe what they see. On top of that is the hateful dialogues that take place on blog sites. I have always loved having a civil exchange of ideas with others, but these blogs are not really the places where honest debate always takes place. Instead, they can be sites where angry people attack others.
Every so often I get sucked into one of these discussions thinking I could add something to a conversation on whatever issue is being talked about. Anymore, it does not always end well. I remember a few years ago a Facebook friend posted a comment about a subject where I disagreed with him. I began to post comments suggesting a different way to look at the issue and he responded in a civil manner disagreeing with me.

Soon, another friend of his entered the debate and began to attack me. I did not know this person and his insults blindsided me, so I began to respond in a very irritated manner. The exchange went on and on and then something happened I will never forget. My old friend on Facebook jumped back into the exchange. He had been reading the comments and I'm sure became distressed over the tone of the discussion. He entered the dialogue and wrote, "it just occurred to me that you two do not know each other." He then wrote glowing little introductions of each of us. "Mike is an intelligent, inquisitive old friend of mine from my days in Tacoma, and he has a beautiful family. Jim is my best friend from seminary. He also has a great family." In a matter of a few minutes, the clash was defused.

It seemed that once we each knew something about the other person then we were no longer faceless people you could easily attack. That *does* seem to be the problem of social media. There is no face to face interaction with people we have never met before. This makes it so much easier to insult faceless strangers you have never met and cannot see.
Jesus did not know about social media but I'm sure if he were walking the earth today he would remind us all of the words he said in the sermon on the mount *, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you"*.

In a polarized society where many of our leaders lead the way in showing us how to hate one another and persecute those who disagree with us, Jesus' words are good advice but unfortunately often ignored. But when you take the time to get to know folks you disagree with—when you take time to discover they are human beings with families they love just like you, it makes it harder to hate them. It helps you to start moving toward loving your enemies and really meaning it. The question is: *What made you enemies in the first place?* By loving and praying for our so-called enemies, we can overcome evil with good. Let's start right now!

Prayer: O God, I thank You for Your great love and the blessings of family and friends. I pray that we remain in deep love and understanding for one another. Guide my heart to love my enemies, even those who have hurt me. Though my wounds may be deep, help me forgive. May I remember the times I have sinned against others and sought forgiveness and how You have always graciously forgiven me. In Christ's name. Amen.