

# McCabe United Methodist Church

January 13 & 14, 2018

## Series: Puzzling Relationship

*The Puzzle of God and Others*

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Let's Pray:

*God of Power and God of mercy, we come this morning seeking an encounter with you. Here and now, I pray that the words of my mouth and the meditations on each of our hearts are acceptable in your sight. You are our Rock and Redeemer. Amen.*

As we continue thinking about puzzling relationships, we remember that the most important, the most critical puzzle pieces as followers of Jesus are loving God and loving the people God puts in front of us. Sometimes this is easier said than done.

Our Scripture this morning says: It's easy enough to love your friend and to hate your enemy, but Jesus doesn't leave it at that. He meddles. Jesus says: If you're gonna love God, if you're gonna love your neighbor, you have to let The Greatest Commandment challenge you because sometimes our neighbors...feel like they are our enemies too. Sometimes the people around us can be hard to be around or it can be hard to let them bring out the best in us.

Love our enemies and let them bring out the best in us... UFFDA!

Johnny Lee Clary was a Ku Klux Klan leader. He was actually the Grand Dragon for the KKK in Oklahoma.

Rev. Wade Watts was a pastor. He was the state leader of the NAACP in Oklahoma.

I've wrestled with how to tell this story. I've decided to just tell it as I understand that it happened. Elements make me cringe. Elements make me chuckle.

I was maybe a teenager when these interactions between Johnny Clary and Rev. Watts met for a live radio debate. They'd agreed, as leaders of their organizations, to debate on live radio in Oklahoma.

Johnny Lee Clary had tunnel vision. He knew what to expect. He was gonna meet with some stereotypical militant with dark skin. Clary "knew" Watts was gonna walk in with big, billowing hair, loud music, and "political" buttons saying things like: Kill Honkies and White people die.

Rev. Watts walked into their meeting. He was wearing a suit. He had a warm smile on his face. He introduced himself: I'm Rev. Wade Watts. I just want you to know Johnny that I love you and Jesus loves you, and he stuck out his hand to shake Johnny's hand.

The whole interaction threw Clary off balance. In a split second Johnny Lee Clary, KKK leader, just reacted. His head was spinning. Without thinking he shook Watts' hand.

It was a Ku Klux Klan rulebook violation. He'd touched someone who wasn't white, and by the rulebook, it was clearly a violation.

Johnny Clary was shocked. Bewildered, he looked at his hand.

Rev. Watts saw the panicked look on Clary's face. He reassured him. Don't worry Johnny, it doesn't rub off.

Johnny Lee Clary unleashed a litany of profanity at Watts. Clary was off balance. He was expecting an eye for eye, a tooth for a tooth.

Rev. Watts smiled saying: You can't do enough to make me hate you Johnny. I'm gonna love you and pray for you whether you like it or not.

That's Matthew 5:44 in action, isn't it?

Love your enemies and let them bring out the best in you.

This was the beginning of an ongoing interaction.

The Klan went to Rev. Watts' home. They harassed him. There was no response.

The Klan threw trash in Rev. Watts' yard. No response.

The Klan showed up in Watts' yard. They were in full dress. They were robed and hooded, spewing threats and hate.

Rev. Watts came out of his house asking: What in the world are you doing? Halloween is 4 months away. Come back in 4 months for some trick-or-treats.

Matthew 5:39: Don't resist an evildoer. If they strike you on the right cheek, turn your other cheek too.

The Klan burned a cross in the lot across the street.

Watts went over and offered them hot dogs and marshmallows.

Matthew 5:40-41: If anyone takes your shirt, give them your coat too. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go a second too.

They set his church on fire. Rev. Watts got an '**anonymous**' phone call threatening him.

When Rev. Watts answered the phone, he thanked Johnny Clary for thinking of him. He thanked Johnny Clary for taking the time to call him and he went right into prayer: *Dear Lord, Please forgive Johnny for being so stupid. There is a good boy in there trying to get out.*

Matthew 5:44 in action. Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. There was a click as Clary's phone line went dead.

A little later, 30 Klansmen walked into a restaurant together. Rev. Watts was sitting there about to eat his chicken dinner. The Klan surrounded his booth and confronted Watts.

Whites only. AND, whatever you do to that chicken on your plate, we're gonna do to you, so you better think about it...

Rev. Watts looked at Johnny.

Rev. Watts looked at the Klan surrounding him.

Watts picked up the chicken... and he kissed it.

Matthew 5:44: Love your enemies and let them bring out the best in you.

Everyone in the restaurant burst out laughing. Even the other 29 Klansmen busted a gut. They were still outside laughing when they heard a honk. Rev. Watts was driving by. He waved and cheerfully offered: Good-night Johnny.

Friends... there's research out there that says the most powerful evangelistic tool we possess... the most effective way we can help people meet Jesus comes down to how we share Jesus. Does God flow through us to our neighbors... neighbors who are friends AND, neighbors some might consider enemies?

When Johnny Clary died, he was a **FORMER** Ku Klux Klan member. Johnny Clary actually became a pastor.

Matthew 5:44: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

The Message Bible says: Love your enemies and let them bring out the best in you.

Rev. Wade Watts and Johnny Lee Clary... just one example of love in such a radical way that it changes hearts and heads.

Rev. Wade Watts was living out this Scripture, loving God and loving neighbor, even the neighbors who wanted to be his enemy.

It's not always easy to love our neighbors, but it's even harder to love our enemies.

Jesus said anybody can love their neighbors. It takes a person of faith to love and care for all people, even people who are different than us, or mean, or hard to get along with.

The Jewish people during Jesus time thought Jesus had arrived to get rid of their enemies. Conditions under the Romans were oppressive. The Jews were treated unfairly. They were heavily taxed. Immoral behavior was rampant.

Roman supporters were Jewish enemies. These enemies were morally and spiritually corrupt.

The Jewish people expected Jesus, their long awaited Savior, to set them free. But instead of leading the people in a violent uprising, Jesus challenged them to lead a different kind of revolution. Jesus led a revolution of mercy and grace, a revolution of compassion and self-sacrifice.

For Jesus, it wasn't about an eye for an eye. Instead, it was love your enemies and let them bring out the best in you. Jesus's revolution drew people to the Kingdom instead of pushing them away.

In the Message Bible translation Matthew 5 says: in a word what I'm saying is: **GROW UP**.... Anybody can love the lovable. If you love the lovable do you expect a special medal? You're subjects of the Kingdom. Now live like it. Live generously and graciously to each other. Live the way God lives toward you.

This is about swallowing our pride. This is about setting our egos aside. This is about living for something bigger than ourselves. Anyone can love a friend. Anyone can retaliate or cling to a grudge. But it takes real guts, it takes true strength to love your enemy.

This was radical language in the 1<sup>st</sup> century.

This was radical language in 1979 when Rev. Watts and Johnny Clary were hating and loving on each other. AND this is still radical language, here and now, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

Love your enemies and let them bring out the best in you.

What do you think? Could this be one of the more challenging passages in Scripture?

Think about your own life. Do you ever have to wrestle with faithfully living out this Scripture?

Is there anyone who really gets under your skin or who grinds on your nerves?

Is there anyone who has your number or their sarcasm cuts to the bone?

It could be a next door neighbor. It could be a politician or someone of a different race. It could be a person with money or a person who has very little money.

Is there anyone who makes those little hairs on the back of your spine bristle?

And then, with this person, or with this group of people, what does it mean to live out this Scripture? What does it mean to let your guard down and open your heart?

Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

Love your enemies and let them bring out the best in you.

Let's pray:

*God of all people, we come this morning in response to a nudging or direction to be here. Nudge us forward dear God. Help us to take the next steps in faith. May we love you and your people in such a way that the world can't help but stop and take notice. We come this morning praying in the name of the one who regularly challenges us in our faith. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*