

Our Human Antagonist

Romans 8:31e

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

When you were little, say a five or six year old, did you ever go to a store where your father knew the owner? And those were kind of magic words -- "My dad knows the owner." Or, "My dad knows the manager." Or, "My dad knows the boss." Or, "My dad knows the custodian." Or, "My dad knows the office boy." Or, "My dad knows anybody that somehow makes this massive thing personal to me." That's the kind of feeling I think, that this person had some connection with me personally and he would treat me as a person with some kindness, or some fairness, or some honesty not just as some impersonal kind of customer, but this person would treat me as a person. I think that was really the heart of it.

As the years passed and we grow into adults it gets more cynical. It becomes the old philosophy, "It's not what you know it's whom you know that counts." With the idea and the overtones that you'll get unfair advantage over somebody else because you're in the know. But I think when we were kids it wasn't that at all, I think it was just, "I know the boss" or "I know the manager" or "my dad knows him." And in some way that gives me some connection with him and I can expect to be treated as a real person with some kindness in this place and it just gives you a great sense of security. And the whole tenuous connection that you had through your father was consolidated tremendously if, of all wonderful things, the son of that owner was in your class and suddenly the fella who actually lived in the same house as the man who owned this huge store, or who ran this huge restaurant, or who was principal of this great school, suddenly it all came a little step nearer because you kind of knew his son whom he actually lived with.

Now, that is of course what Easter was all about. That's what last Sunday was all about. It was history's reassurance that a human being like ourselves had died, had disappeared off the earth, had come back for more than a month and before he disappeared for good had assured us, "My Father is the creator and the owner of this universe and he loves you and he wants you to have the kind of life that he and I have." And suddenly you began to sense you knew the owner of the store and it just transforms everything. From the world being a kind of lonely, unfriendly place full of things that you can't trust and that you have to be scared of, it suddenly becomes a dear friendly place that your Father owns.

Suddenly the Atlantic is safe for you because it's his swimming pool and you know that he knows every corner of that swimming pool and that swimming pool is safe for you because of it. Suddenly the sunset is something that you own a piece of because your father is the real owner of that. And loved ones, it has transformed many of our attitudes to the whole world, this experience of receiving the life of the Spirit of our Creator into us when we receive Jesus as a Savior into our lives. It changed our whole attitude and it made us think differently and feel differently about everything that happens to us. And that is of course, the real heart of the verse that we've been studying for about four weeks.

It's that verse that runs, "If God is for us who is against us?" "If God is for us, who is against us?" And the whole message in that verse is, listen, if the owner of the universe is for you, what does it matter who else is against you? And, who really is against you? What we've been saying over the past few weeks is that Satan is against us for one. Satan is a spirit being. There are

human beings like us with human bodies and there are spirit beings, beings that have just spirits, that have no physical bodies. Satan is a spirit being who used his free will to rebel against the Creator of the universe. And he's been permitted by the Creator to continue to exist in order to provide us with a constant sense of choice throughout our lives as to whether we will listen to his lies, or his deception about the Creator of the universe -- or whether we will listen to the truths about the Creator of the universe that Jesus has given to us.

And so this Satan has continued to exist by God's own permission. He's in fact defeated, because God only allows him to continue to exist in order to continue to put before us the choice: will we believe that God is as he says he is, or will we believe lies about him? In other words, it's to continue to bring before us the responsibility we have to exercise our free will but Satan is, in fact, defeated. And Jesus made that very clear, when he said, "Listen, you don't have to do much with Satan to get rid of him." And James, I think, said it most clearly in James 4:7 if you look at it. And this may be good to remember because I think a lot of us build Satan up in our minds and don't realize that his only power is that of deception and lying and really, he himself has no power. To get rid of him all we have to do is what God shows us in James 4:7.

James 4:7, "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you." Actually, that's all we have to do. You don't have to put on a big battle and start casting him out of yourself and make a whole deal about it, you just have to resist him actually because he is defeated. He is only suffered by God to continue to exist to bring before us the need to choose God's truth rather than his lies to exercise our free wills. God wants us to exercise our free wills. He doesn't want them to go to sleep or be passive and so he allows Satan to continue to exist. But all we have to do to get rid of him is refuse him and resist him. Refuse to acquiesce in his lies and that's it.

So loved ones, will you remember that anybody who is getting all down under Satan and believing the lie that he is some being with tremendous power, he has not. You just resist him and he'll flee from you -- that's it. I think some of us this morning might answer the question differently. Romans 8:31 goes, "If God is for us who is against us?" And I think some of us here this morning might say, "Well, Satan's against me. My own misconceptions of God are against me. The lies I believe about God they're against me. I see that. But if you were in my shoes week, after week, after week, you'd see who was against me. My wife does not understand what I have to face day-by-day, she doesn't. She doesn't understand as old Archie (Bunker) would say, "It's a jungle out there." She doesn't."

Or "My poor husband, he's against me. He just doesn't understand the amount of work that has to be done at home. He's my enemy. Who is against me? My son, he's against me. He doesn't understand the responsibilities I have. He doesn't understand how difficult it is to keep bread in the home day-by-day. He's against me. My friends are against me. They're against me day-by-day. Do you know they let me down at the worst possible moment, just when I need them most they let me down. Who is against me? All kinds of people are against me. They're not against me all the time but yeah, I have enemies working against me. My professor, he's against me. If you saw the busy work that he expects me to turn in day, after day, after day, you'd see how much he's against me. If you saw my roommate, you'd see that she's against me if you saw the way she treats the room as if it's just her room -- you'd think nobody else was living in the room but her. You'd think I have no rights to have anything in that room at all. Yeah, she's against me. The repairman is against me. The plumber is against me. The electrician is against me. I know they're out to get me. They're out to bring my life to a grinding halt. Who is against me? All kinds of people are against me."

And loved ones, I'm wondering how many of us would say that -- "we have enemies, all kinds of enemies that really don't understand where it's at with us. We have friends that, if they had any sense, they would stand by us but they let us down at just the wrong time. My boss is against me, he expects me to do all kinds of ridiculous things just because I'm conscientious. He gives me far more than I can handle. He's against me. My associates at work, they're against me. Just because I'm responsible they leave everything to me and I'm left holding the heavy end all the time." How many of us loved ones, would say that?

And you know it's dumb -- it just is. It is lies and bluff completely. Even if those poor souls do something against you they probably are not conscious that they're doing it. And if they are conscious that they're doing it, they're probably not conscious of all the effects it's having on you. And they probably, even though it looks to you as if they've done it with malice or forethought, it looks to you as if they've sat up in their room at night working out, "How can I destroy that person?" Even though it looks to you that way probably it isn't that. There aren't too many of us that spend our evenings planning each other's destruction the next day. Probably even if they have worked against you they've done it without knowing. Or, if they've done it at all they've done it without realizing the effects it would have on your life.

But loved ones, the most important thing of all is they didn't initiate the thing at all. They didn't. Now, you'll see that, if Jesus was faced with it, faced with a dear friend who just at a crucial point in Jesus' life showed that he didn't understand where Jesus was at at all and he advised Jesus to do something that was exactly opposite to what Jesus knew he should do, and wait till you see the way Jesus speaks to him. It's Matthew 16:21, "From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him and began to rebuke him, saying, 'God forbid, Lord! This shall never happen to you.' But he turned and said to Peter," and obviously he didn't address Peter but addressed the real person who had prompted Peter to say that. "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me." Not, "Get behind me, Peter! You are a hindrance to me." But, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me; for you are not on the side of God, but of men."

Loved ones, they aren't your enemies. Your dear wife, your dear husband, your dear friends, that mother who is out to destroy your life, that father who just does not understand what life is like today for sons and daughters, they are not your enemies and they themselves have no desire to destroy you. But Satan gets into all of us and deceives us into saying things and doing things that work for the destruction of the other person. But loved ones, it is him that is doing it.

Now, I agree with you, Jesus knew that if he had continued to acquiesce in that lie of Satan and that deception, eternal death would eventually come to him. And I agree completely with you, that if they continue to acquiesce in Satan's lies and Satan's deception eternal death will come to them so it is their responsibility before God. But loved ones, it's time we ourselves saw that the initiation of the action does not come from them. They simply go with a tide that is flowing from Satan towards us. It is Satan himself that is at the back of it.

And Jesus saw it so clearly that when men and women act against each other it is not them themselves that are doing it. To a certain extent, loved ones, we human beings are really neutral instruments that have to be governed either by a power of good or a power of evil, a power of God or a power of Satan and all we do is acquiesce and say, "Yes to that power or yes to that power." But loved ones,

it's the power that we have to resist and stand against. It is not the poor little instrument that Satan uses at that time. Jesus made this clear about Peter in Luke 22:31. Jesus made it clear that Satan has no body of his own and so he has to act through the bodies of human beings and his aim is to get hold of these human beings so that he can use them.

Luke 22:31, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren. And he said to him, 'Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death.' He said, 'I tell you, Peter, the cock will not crow this day, until you three times deny that you know me.'" And yet Jesus had no antagonism to Peter. And it would have been so easy for us to say, "I've told you Peter all that I know. I've shown you myself more openly than anybody else and yet you're going to deny me?" And yet Jesus didn't take that attitude to him at all but said, "Satan is anxious to use you but I have prayed for you."

Now loved ones, it's the same with us. Do you not see that Satan laughs when he gets a husband and wife fighting each other? Do you not see that? Do you not see that he sits and laughs because he knows that they're responding not against each other but against him and actually they're ignoring their real enemy and they're fighting bluff enemies. Loved ones, every time roommates argue back and forward and are sarcastic with each other, do you see that Satan laughs because it is him that prompted that argument in the first place.

Every time you work up a tremendous resentment against your boss, or against some authority that is over you, you send at least psychic emotions and thoughts against that person but probably even more, you release spiritual powers against them and Satan laughs because that isn't your real enemy at all -- it's him that is underneath. And what is he trying to do? Well, it's there in Galatians 5:15, "But if you bite and devour one another take heed that you are not consumed by one another." Loved ones, that's what Satan is after.

He wants to get us to consume each other. He is after our death and if he can get you to once treat your roommate, or your husband, or your wife, or your boss, or your associate at work, or your friend in class even temporarily as your enemy -- "who is against me? These monsters are against me." If he can once get you to treat them like that, he's already begun to use you to bring about their destruction. How many husbands have died early of hypertension because of the nagging, nagging, nagging of their wives? And how many wives have died of ulcers and of anxiety because of husbands who would not take their own place of responsibility in the home? How many mums and dads have been worn to early deaths by kids that wouldn't put themselves in their parents' shoes for one moment? How many bosses have retired early because the people working under them never thought of them as anything but a boss and never for one moment thought of them as a human being with ordinary family troubles like everybody else? Loved ones, Satan's job is to use us to destroy each other.

What is Jesus' way? Distinguish your real enemy. For goodness sake stop fighting as if they were both your enemy. See that one is usually the innocent tool, or the deceived tool, or the tricked tool of the real enemy that is Satan. Would you resist Satan, would you stand against him, and would you pray for the person that lives with you, or pray for the person that you work with? Loved ones, will you start making a distinction?

1 Corinthians 13 is so good and I used to think Paul was dumb -- "love believes all things." I thought, "Believe all things and you're destroyed, you're ruined." And then I began to see love bears all things. One of the modern translations says, "Love is always eager to believe the best."

Loved ones, start doing that with the people that you think are your enemies. Start being eager to believe the best about them. Start seeing this is Satan that used them to bring this about. "Lord, I believe that. I believe the best about them. I believe that they have been deceived by Satan and Lord Jesus I pray for them now that you will give them light and enable them to see the situation rightly. And now Satan, I resist you, I stand against you, I refuse any affects that this will have in my life."

But loved ones, that's the way to deal with our real enemy. Stop this business of who is against us -- your friends, your wives, your husbands, your associates -- it doesn't even seem reasonable if you think about it that they should be against you. But, it is true that Satan is in fact using you. I think many of us say, "But they'll destroy me -- they'll destroy me if I keep letting them do this. If I don't resist them or stand against them they'll destroy my life." Loved ones, God has made it clear who is in charge. You should look at it, 1 Corinthians 10:13. "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it."

There's no trial and there's no difficulty that has come upon you through another person, or through circumstances, or through events that God has not already examined lovingly and stamped, "Okay, they can bear that." And any that you cannot bear he has already filtered out of the situation so that it will not come to you. Loved ones, do you realize how many situations could come that would have destroyed you already? You know how weak you are, you know the kind of thing that could have destroyed you in one stroke. God has kept all those things from you. And there is no trial, and there's no temptation, there's no difficulty that comes to you day-by-day that has not already been examined closely by him and has been stamped, "Okay -- personally adapted to you -- you can bear it."

And he has already worked out a way by which you can escape and a way by which you can be delivered. And the only way that you find it is to immediately look up to him and stop fighting those paper tigers. Stop fighting those enemies that aren't he real enemy. Resist the real enemy and look to the Father who has already planned a way of escape. You know so many of us think in our own human little terms and we say, "Yeah, yeah, but my boss, him, He couldn't control him. My boss has no respect for man, or God, or beast. Nobody could touch my boss." And loved ones, don't you see it's dumb! Don't you see that there is no one beyond the Father's control.

It's there in Proverbs and it's a verse that has helped a lot of us that have been concerned about our futures, and about the powers the professors have over our futures whether we pass or not, about bosses and the authority they seem to have over our promotion. It's Proverbs 21:1, "The king's heart," even the heart of the king, "is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will." Loved ones it does not matter if it's President Ford, it does not matter if it's Putin, it does not matter if it's an unfeeling professor, it does not matter if it's an unsympathetic boss. Do you see, the heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord and the Lord turns it whichever way he wants for your eventual good.

There is no wild-cat force in your life that is not under the control of your living Father. There is no force that he cannot switch whatever way he eventually wants to bring about what he has planned in your life. And loved ones, the way he does it is the way he does it with you, he woos you to do certain things. So he does with the boss, and the kings, and the professors of this world. There is no enemy, there is no power that can destroy your life or bring anything into it

that God himself does not want.

Many of us say, "But the things that I've gone through I can't even see the purpose of them. It seems that these individuals are just senseless, stupid, uncomprehending forces. They're almost automatons or robots. These people and these things that happen to me, there's no sense or purpose in them." And loved ones, you know the purpose is obvious right throughout scripture and it will be obvious in your life too if you begin to look at it this way. It's in Job that is quoted as the book that talks about suffering. And so many people who don't understand it say, "Oh yeah, that's a problem book." And really it's not -- it's a beautiful book that expresses the heart of the way God uses trials and difficulties.

It's Job 19:13, and many of us wonder, "Satan's work seems to be pointless, seems to be purposeless. How can God bring any meaning out of it?" Verse 13, "He has put my brethren far from me." This is the kind of isolation that Job experienced. "He has put my brethren far from me, and my acquaintances are wholly estranged from me. My kinsfolk and my close friends have failed me; the guests in my house have forgotten me; my maidservants count me as a stranger; I have become an alien in their eyes. I call to my servant, but he gives me no answer; I must beseech him with my mouth. I am repulsive to my wife, loathsome to the sons of my own mother. Even young children despise me; when I rise they talk against me. All my intimate friends abhor me, and those whom I loved have turned against me. My bones cleave to my skin and to my flesh, and I have escaped by the skin of my teeth. Have pity on me, have pity on me, O you my friends, for the hand of God has touched me! Why do you, like God, pursue me? Why are you not satisfied with my flesh? Oh that my words were written! Oh that they were inscribed in a book! Oh that with an iron pen and lead they were graven in the rock for ever! For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then from my flesh I shall see God." That's why. There's no way to come to depend on the Father until you find that all other dependencies are bluff and temporal and will pass away.

Now loved ones, every so called enemy of yours is some poor soul that is deceived or tricked by Satan with a view to destroying you and God is turning the whole thing round so that you will be brought to a place of such confidence in him that you will not depend on any other crutch be it good health, many friends, good wife, husband, father, mother, reliable job. Loved ones, really if God is for us who is against us? Nobody worth talking about, that's the truth. Thank God. Let us pray.

Dear Father, we thank you for your clear word to us that there is no trial or temptation come upon us above what we are able to bear. And that with the trial itself there'll be immediately a way of escape that you have devised. And Father thank you for showing us that this dear roommate of ours, even these dear ones that are competing against us at work, they are not in control of things themselves. Even those who do the worst against us are being used by the power that rebelled against you. And Lord we thank you that that power has no power worth talking about. Thank you Father that we can resist Satan and we can immediately look to you in every situation and find out from you how you are bringing us into greater dependence on yourself through this trial, through this difficulty. Thank you Lord that if you are for us then there is no one against us who is not under your control. Thank you, Lord. Amen.

