

TI want to start with the question, “Where does hate come from?” In George Orwell’s classic novel *1984*, Orwell imagines a dystopian world that has been taken over by a tyrannical political regime that governs through emotional manipulation. In Orwell’s fictional land called “Oceania,” individual thinking is a crime against the state. Citizens are under constant surveillance. Through propaganda and other means, the state is stabilized and controlled.

The construction of the enemy was predominately fueled by forced participation in a ritual called the “Two Minutes Hate.” The ritual was designed to propagate hate and collective rage toward Oceania’s enemy. The idea was that collective hatred could unify a country, and hate requires an enemy, an “other.”

There was a ritual where every citizen of Oceania was required to enter a theater every day that played programs featuring disparaging images of the face of their enemy “Emmanuel Goldstein.” These depictions would swell up the ire of the crowd toward hatred and emotional manipulation.

Listen to the narrator’s description of the ritual.

The next moment, a hideous, grinding speech, as of some monstrous machine running without oil, burst from the big telescreen at the end of the room. It was a noise that set one’s teeth on edge and bristled the hair at the back of one’s neck. The Hate had started. Before the Hate had proceeded for thirty seconds, uncontrollable exclamations of rage were breaking out from half the people in the room...In its second minute, the Hate rose to a frenzy. People were leaping up and down in their places and shouting at the tops of their voices in an effort to drown the maddening bleating voices that came from the screen...In a lucid moment, Winston found that he was shouting with the others and kicking his heel violently against the rung of his chair. The horrible thing about the Two Minutes Hate was not that one was obliged to act a part, but, on the contrary, that it was impossible to avoid jumping in.

Hate has a way of sweeping up everything in its path. It consumes, blinds, distorts, and, yes, terrifyingly even unifies. And I don’t think I need to do much work connecting the imagery of the “Two Minutes Hate” to our world that is often fueled by a similar hate.

While we may not have the overt production of a “Two Minutes Hate” ritual, we do have social media and the comments section on YouTube. For us, hate manifests itself in polarization, the flippancy of social media interactions, cancel culture, racism, and the many other ways we “otherize” those who think, vote, and live differently than us.

While hate seems to be the currency of our modern world, hatred is nothing but the product of a cheapened and stultified imagination. It is a failure to see possibilities, a failure to believe that resurrection is possible within “the other.” Put differently, hate impoverishes our imagination and degrades our ability to hope. Hate is entirely unoriginal. To “otherize” someone or some group is to rely on a frame of mind that has been with us since Cain and Abel. Hate is cheap. Hate is easy.

If we want to do something genuinely creative, something actually original, we should lay down our hubris and take seriously the teaching of a first-century rabbi when he said, “*Love your enemy.*”

So I asked the question, “Where does hate come from?” Let me now ask you a more pointed and personal question, who do you hate? Don’t dismiss the question too quickly. None of us would easily admit that we hate anyone. But sit with it a bit longer. Who do you hate?

We are finishing our time in the book of Jonah, and if your experience is anything like mine, growing up, the story of Jonah stops at the end of chapter 3. Or at least when we think about the story of Jonah now, it usually stops at chapter 3. It stops with the whale swallowing Jonah, Jonah changing, preaching to Nineveh, and the whole city repenting. That all happens, but it isn’t how the story ends. And if you stop the story there, you are missing the central point.

In Chapter 4, the narrative comes together in a way that provokes us to look internally and expose some of the darker parts of our heart. God exposes that the people of God are not exempt from some of the ugliest parts of humanity. At minimum, we should read the story of Jonah and come away recognizing that our capability for self-deception, hypocrisy, and hatred is far greater than we could ever imagine.

And so I hope to make us slightly uncomfortable with the message of Jonah, and I hope to leave you asking yourself questions. Because of that, I don’t have one central point or main idea as a takeaway, but rather I have questions that I want to leave with you. Are you comfortable with a God who loves those we hate? Are you okay with a God who loves your enemy? What do you do with and how do you feel about a God who loves those you hate?

Turn with me to chapter 4 of Jonah. This chapter will detail three things that hate does to us. What is the first thing hate does to us?

Hate diminishes our imagination for what is possible with God.

Let’s start in Jonah 3:10.

When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them

the destruction he had threatened. But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. vv. 3:10-4:1

This should feel backward because it is. For any prophet of God, this would be a huge success, but Jonah is fuming! He is furious. Jonah has just preached the shortest, most mediocre sermon ever preached, five words in Hebrew, and the entire city of Nineveh repented. This should be on the top line of Jonah's resumé; it should be the crowning achievement of his career as a prophet, I mean even the cows repented in Nineveh. *"But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry" (4:1).*

Here is the irony, almost humorous, in the narrative, all of the characters that were considered and named "evil" found grace and repented. Think of the pagan sailors distant from God. They find grace. Think of Nineveh, distant from God, filled with evil. They find grace. And now, the prophet of God, Jonah, fledgling in his faithfulness, filled with hate. Will he find grace?

The author has been setting up this moment in the text where the furthest from God have come to repentance, and now we are left wondering, will the one closest to God come to repentance? Or was the one who was supposed to be the closest to God all along actually the furthest from God? Let's read further and discover why Jonah is so angry.

He prayed to the Lord, "Isn't this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live." vv. 2-3

It is hard to describe the viciousness of the people of Nineveh. They were perpetrators of some of the cruelest practices, what we would call crimes against humanity, and certainly would transgress our measure of war crimes today. His anger is fueled by a seemingly justified cause, that the very thought that God could offer grace to such an evil people was appalling, and I would guess it would be offensive to us today as well.

So in his anger he prays. And does this prayer or description of God sound familiar at all? *"I know that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity" (v. 2).* This is a very common Old Testament description of God. More specifically, Jonah is quoting Exodus 34, and it is actually a quote about what God says about himself. Jonah is trying to throw God's words back at God.

The story is in Exodus 34, and it comes after Moses was up on Mount Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments. While he is receiving the Ten Commandments, of which two are "do not make any idols," the people of God, who had just been saved out of slavery by Yahweh, are at the base of the mountain creating a golden calf to worship. Long story short, God is furious, and he is going to bring judgment on them. But Moses intercedes on their behalf.

And what does God do in response? He forgives them and renews the covenant. Moses is confused and perplexed by this gracious act and

wants to know who this God is, to which God replies, *"The lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin" (Ex. 34:6-7a).* And Jonah takes these words and throws them back at God, "I knew you were like this! You've always been like this! Since day one, you've forgiven people that don't deserve it!" This is why Jonah ran because his hatred for the Ninevites was so strong; he didn't want God to be God.

Here is what has been most frightening to me about Jonah's prayer as I've sat with this passage this week. Jonah's theology of God was accurate, and yet it doesn't lead to a life of greater love but a life of greater hatred. This should be a warning to us all. We can know all of the right things about God, we can have all of our doctrines and theological questions laid out perfectly, and the result can still be a life filled with hatred.

For Jonah, and often for us, there is a gap between what we know and how we live. And that is because we assume we are predominately thinking creatures. But we are far more formed by what we love. We live our lives not from what we intellectually know, but from what we love. We are first and foremost beings that live from our gut, our heart, and not from our heads. The task of discipleship is the reshaping of our loves, not just information consumption.

For Jonah, the hatred that filled his heart overpowered the theology in his head. Because of this, it blocked his very imagination of what was possible with a God like the one he described. Think of Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 13.

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging symbol. If I have the gift of prophesy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 1 Cor. 13:1-2

You see, church, we gather every single week, often more than once a week, through our other various ministries. We hear the scriptures and study the words of God, and we grow in knowledge week after week after week. And this is a good thing, an essential thing, but it is not the ultimate thing. The aim of all of our knowledge is to grow in our love for God, for others, and for the world. If this is not our aim, then I fear what has happened to Jonah and what Paul warns us about will happen to us. We will become nothing.

But Jonah remains filled with rage at the idea that God would want to save his enemies. So much so that he says he would rather be dead than live in a world in which the Ninevites were shown mercy. *"Now, LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live."* The motivation for Jonah's anger and criticism of God's grace is actually quite believable and understandable to us if we are honest with ourselves because this is the scandal of God's grace.

You see, the problem with hate is it diminishes our imagination for what God can do and is doing! Hate blinds us to the possibility that God is working to reconcile all things to him and is working among those we

believe are the furthest from God. Hate short-circuits our ability to see the possible; it reduces our perceived ability of God.

I want to introduce you to a figure who resisted the diminishing of his imagination when he had all the incentive to hate: Howard Thurman and The Montgomery Bus Boycott. Thurman was an intellectual, philosopher, and theologian who, in 1949, at the height of the Jim Crow south and racial segregation, published a book entitled *Jesus and the Disinherited*. The book interprets the teachings of Jesus through the experience of the oppressed. It is a challenging and thought-provoking read. In his chapter on hatred, he talks about this very idea of how hatred diminishes our ability to imagine what God could be up to.

Above and beyond all else, it must be borne in mind that hatred tends to dry up the springs of creative thought in the life of the hater so that his resourcefulness becomes completely focused on the negative aspects of his environment. The urgent needs of the personality for creative expression are starved to death. A man's horizon may become so completely dominated by the intense character of his hatred that there remains no creative residue in his mind and spirit to give great ideas, to great concepts. He becomes lopsided...Jesus rejected hatred. It was not because he lacked the vitality or the strength. It was not because he lacked the incentive. Jesus rejected hatred because he saw that hatred meant death to the mind, death to the spirit, death to communion with his Father. He affirmed life; and hatred was the great denial.

This is what happened to Jonah, and this is what happens to us when we allow hate to consume us. It creates a death to the mind, spirit, and imagination. Hatred diminishes our imagination for what is possible in God's work. The first thing hate does to us is diminish our imagination.

Hate isolates and distorts our perspective.

"Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city" (v. 5). Jonah, once again, ignores God's question. Rather than answer, Jonah again flees. This time outside the city walls. He creates a shelter—meaning he is planning on being there for a while—and is waiting to see what will happen to the city. My guess is he's planning on waiting there for 40 days to see the city destroyed! God, recognizing Jonah's irrationality and spiraling down a destructive path, tries a different tactic with him.

Then the Lord God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant. But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered. When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, 'It would be better for me to die than to live.' But God said to Jonah, 'Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?' 'It is,' he said, 'and I'm so angry I wish I were dead.' vv. 6-9

At this point, Jonah needs a hug. He is outraged and irrational. His emotional roller coaster, quite frankly, reminds me of my five-year-old! A

few Halloweens ago, we were trick-or-treating through our neighborhood, and our community would go all out for Halloween. Decorations on all the houses, haunted houses, goblins, smoke machines, mummies, holograms, the whole bit.

And for Adley, who dressed up as sweet little Rapunzel, it was a whirlwind of emotion. She would walk from house to house looking at the decorations and declaring, "This is great!" or "This is not great!" At one house, she got absolutely frightened by something that jumped out at her and immediately was in tears wanting to go home, only to be consoled just as quickly by candy given to her with her whole demeanor shifting to exuberant glee!

In some ways, this is what I see in Jonah, an emotional wreck! Elated at one point and then wracked by despair the next. God asks once again if his anger is justified. *"Is it right for you to be angry...about the plant?"* God is trying to give perspective to Jonah, but his hatred has blinded him to rationality.

This is what hatred does, it narrows our perspective, and we feel justified in our hatred. We rationalize our hatred, believing it is the right and just thing to do. It drives us away and isolates us, not only from the target of our hate but also from those who think differently than us.

So often, our division and hatred are perpetuated by our perspective. We judge ourselves based on our best moments, and we judge others from their worst moments. We hold two different standards, placing ourselves within reach of God's grace and our enemies outside of God's reach.

Hatred diminishes our perspective, and God is trying hard to broaden our understanding of his mercy to see the larger picture of what he is doing in the world, reconciling all things to himself. Hate does one more thing to us, and it is the grace of God that we are confronted with this final one. It comes right in the last few verses of the text.

Hate forces us to reckon with God's mercy.

But the Lord said, "You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left - and also many animals? vv. 10-11

End scene, credits roll. What a fascinating and brilliant way to end this story, albeit a touch frustrating. It ends with a simple and straight forward question to Jonah. "You cared about this tiny plant that you did nothing to create or manage. Shouldn't I care about this great city of 120,000 people that I created?" This is the question God leaves us with as well.

We can be frustrated that we don't know how Jonah responds, sure, but the author is doing this intentionally. Because the story was never really about Jonah, was it? It was about you, and it's about me; it was about a word from God to his people. It is about God confronting the very real possibility of our hatred and religious hypocrisy.

Ultimately, Jonah is a caricature of God's people, and what the entire book of Jonah is exposing is our propensity toward hypocrisy, hatred, and division. The story exposes some of the ugliest possibilities within the people of God. And before you rationalize this out of your possibility, we need to give space to be honest before ourselves and before God.

Here's the uncomfortable truth that we all have to face. We live in the hypocritical tension of embracing and welcoming God's radical love for ourselves but not for our enemies. The problem is we have bought into our self-delusion that we somehow deserve the gracious love of God. We have severely and arrogantly overestimated our worthiness of grace and overestimated the heinousness and unworthiness of the other.

Jesus' Deconstruction of Enemies

What we see enacted by God in the story of Jonah is one of the central tenets and central ethics of our faith. And ironically, it is one of the most ignored teachings of our faith—Jesus deconstructs the very idea of an enemy. He does so in two ways.

Consider Jesus' words in Matthew 5:43-47.

You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?

I really want to push you not to sentimentalize or over-spiritualize this text. It is so easy for us to dismiss this teaching. But what if Jesus actually meant what he said? What if Jesus wanted us to love our enemies, the ones we hate. But if we are honest with ourselves, we usually just say, "That's great, Jesus, but I'm not going to do that." We may not flee to Tarshish, but we might as well have.

We are convinced that Jesus didn't understand what he was talking about, and we assure Jesus that the world doesn't operate that way. That sort of backward thinking is merely utopian dreams about a world that doesn't actually exist. And we write Jesus off as a radical but not pragmatic.

I think Jesus is doing what God is doing in the story of Jonah. I think Jesus responds to our rejection of this teaching by looking at us and saying, "Actually, you all are the ones living upside down. This is how you were created to live, and the example can be seen no further than each of our own individual lives." We all have lived in opposition to God as enemies. We are all Jonah. We all, at some level and varying degree,

have made a mess of our lives and have become enemies of God. And yet, God has loved his enemies. God loved me, and God loved you.

Pray for your enemies.

So what do we do with this message? What do you do with your hate? What is the step that you take to move more toward Jesus' ethic of enemy love? I think it is right there in Jesus' words, Pray for your enemies. Don't just pray spitefully for them to change or come to their senses; that is just another form of self-righteousness rearing its ugly head. Pray for their flourishing. Pray for their well-being. Pray for their families and loved ones.

Because in praying, you counter hate. Prayer, genuine prayer, opens up your imagination to what God might do. It resists isolation and creates space for your own perspective to widen. It allows room for the Holy Spirit to remind us that those we think of as our enemies are actually brothers and sisters, fellow image-bearers in this faith journey with us. And by praying, you are bringing them to your mind, and you resist the urge to isolate from them.

So let me conclude by asking you the same question I asked at the beginning of the message. Who do you hate? Who is your enemy? Bring them to mind. Put a name or face to your enemy. Maybe it is a neighbor or a co-worker? Maybe it is the opposing political party or religious group?

Should not God have concern for them too?

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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