

I had to make a choice. It didn't seem like you could pick both. So naturally I picked Friends. I had watched Seinfeld much less, and honestly I don't think I could appreciate the nuance of the humour when I was that young. The drama between Ross and Rachael, Joey's antics, those are things I could appreciate. But now that Seinfeld's on Netflix, I think I need to give it another chance because I would get it now... A show about nothing sounds good these days...

I was not old when I first felt compelled to pick between two competing ideas—Friends or Seinfeld, this or that. And some days it feels like that's all life is now. Dogs or cats? Summer or winter? Coffee or tea? Or, you know, the much more divisive ideas that flood your news source, your social media, your dinner conversation.

Maybe I'm naïve, but it really does feel like the world has become more divided. The divisions always existed, I suppose, but now more than ever you *must* pick a side, and you *must* hate the others on the other side. Doesn't matter which side you're on, this is the pressure.

And I mean about anything. I don't hate cats, but because I'm a dog person I honestly feel like I must express a genuine dislike for cats. And yes, I recognize how insane this sounds. But if I feel this way even a little bit over my choice of four-legged friends, imagine the pressure placed on the big issues.

What we're dealing with here is an issue of justification. The world has convinced every person that we must prove we are okay, we are right, we are just, by being on the right side of every issue. Each issue has become an idol to serve in the hopes that it will justify your existence and provide your life meaning.

And whether it's over your beverage choices, your tv preferences, or your political and fiscal opinions, those who serve the idol on the other side, they are now your enemy.

Your enemy.

You don't like him. You don't want to be around her. But Jesus says to love them.

But are these your enemies? We treat them so. They make our blood pressure spike like a good enemy ought to. But they are not your enemies.

First century Christians knew what it meant to have enemies. The Christians who would have first heard the Gospels and the Epistles read, they were either feeling the pressure from the Jews to change their opinions and renounce Jesus as the promised Messiah, or they were facing death from the Romans who had taken over and

destroyed Jerusalem. Far too often it didn't simply mean a friendship lost or an awkward conversation over coffee if you disagreed with your enemies in this context. It meant you were driven from your home or stolen from or hated killed. Christians in this time didn't have the luxury to explode over the smaller things in life; they were busy watching their step, fleeing for their life, and clinging to Christ literally for dear life.

Paul, likely writing from prison, jailed for the faith he proclaimed, mind you, warned the Christians in Philippi to follow his example and that of all the faithful, rather than falling into step with those he calls "enemies of the cross of Christ." Do not become like those who oppose Christ, denying His death and resurrection and the power of such an act. Do not let their pressure or persuasion draw you away from your Lord.

And Jesus, later on in Luke's Gospel, in the midst of the Pharisee's accusations that He's working with Beelzebub, Jesus describes wonderfully clearly that there's only two camps you can be in. "If you're not with me," He says, "you're against me."

For this reason, those who believed in Jesus, those who had been baptized into His name, those who had become part of His family, they were able to stand in the face of those who were against them because ultimately they were against Jesus, and if He was victorious over death for their sake, He would certainly be faithful to them even through their death.

This makes our enemies today seem a lot less threatening, doesn't it?

I hope, realistically, that this makes us all realize that our enemies today are not who we might think they are. Our enemies are not those that we differ from on penultimate issues, on those things which are important, but are not the most important.

Your enemies, your only true enemies, are those that deny Christ, His cross and His empty tomb and His gifts for all of humanity. Whether they persecute you or not, whether they vocalize doubt or disdain for your faith is irrelevant. These include your best friends and your least favourite people, your closest family members and the most distant strangers, those who agree with you in every other area of life and those that you can't find one common interest with. Your enemies, or shall I say Christ's enemies, are all around you, whether they act and seem like enemies at all.

But they are not those in the Church, even if you can't see eye to eye, even if you can barely resist throwing a punch or taking to the keyboard.

Your enemies are the people that don't want Christ to be preached and believed because they don't believe in Him either, even because they think it harmful or toxic to believe in Him, and it's those people that just don't care if He's believed in because they don't believe in Him or anything, so it doesn't matter just don't bother me with it.

These are Christ's enemies because they deny Him, and these are your enemies because you are one with Christ, found inside Him and His life.

It sounds like I'm building up an "us vs. them" mentality. Like we either need to rally the troops to war or to retreat, that our enemies would be either defeated or removed from our little bubble, but this is not the case at all. Instead, in recognizing who the enemies are, we are then prepared to treat them as Christ commands.

Love your enemies. Do good to those who hurt you (and those who want to). Pray for those who curse you. Offer the other cheek when someone strikes you for your faith.

Jesus invites us to abandon all sense of self-security and well-being here. What does it matter if someone mocks you for praying? What does it do to you if someone belittles you for hoping in that which is promised and still unseen? What loss is it when you give to a non-believer and they take advantage of your generosity and don't return the favour?

It is easy to care for those that care for you. And in the house of God we are called to do precisely that, to care for those who are in need, those who are mourning among us, those whom the world has left wanting these days, those who need a hand juggling life. And among us, among the family, it is presumed that each person will have their chance giving and receiving and it'll all work out.

But outside these walls, to those who haven't heard of Christ, who reject Christ, who want to reject us because of Christ, rather than becoming protective over our time, our money, our prayers and our empathy and concern, we are to be so scandalously generous, even wasteful with all that we've been given. Christ calls us to go against the natural path, against the sinful nature that still works within us, and give not when it's easy but when it is hard, even impossible. He invites us to a venture that doesn't "pay off" as the world sees it. No, our return will be absolutely dismal, but so what? Even if we see nothing for our efforts, we are still called to love those who despise us, to give to those who will

simply take from us and forget about us, to pray for those that may never know the God who is caring for them. Jesus calls us to have pity on them and simply love, not caring about what the future may hold.

But don't do this from a place of condescension, looking down on those around you, despising them for their lack of faith and God-given-goodness. No, we do this recognizing just what has been given us. For Paul tells us in Romans "God showed His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us...For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, how much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by His life?" We were once on the other side of the dividing line from God. The sinner spewing hate against a holy God. And the sinner in us still wants us to betray God and jump ship.

Yet even while we were sinners, enemies of God, while we were mocking Jesus for His faith, striking His cheeks and robbing Him of His clothes, He went to the cross, crowned with our shame and our sin, and He went silently, without fighting back though He had every right to. He gave and gave and gave, and we just continued to take. In reality that hasn't changed even today. He gives and we receive—it's how our teacher loves to operate. He is kind and merciful to all, even when we are still ungrateful for His care. He, as the Son of the Most High, gives expecting nothing in return, but in His generosity many come to Him. And so Christ tells us, invites us, causes us to become merciful just as your Father is merciful.

This is what it looks like as we become just like your teacher. You receive from the abundance of His charity and goodness, and filled with that, charity and goodness sprout forth like fruit from a tree. You receive from the Rock and you are built upon Him, so no matter what the world throws your way, no matter what others say about your faith, you remain secure because your teacher likewise remained steadfast in faith even to death.

In this way, through the love you share and from the place in Him where you stand firm, Christ turns enemies into friends, just has been done with you and so with many many more.

But if this is how we are to treat our true enemies, what about those on the other side of the many other fences in life? Well, there is a time for right and wrong, but if we can reserve judgment and presume the best and patiently work together, that is the better way. And there is a time to set boundaries, that someone who has sinned against you, abused you, taken advantage of you can't do it again, but even there, to work to forgive them before you part ways is

the better thing to do. And there is a time to protect yourself, from those that would just hurt you and steal from you, and when you can show the other cheek or give the shirt off your back, go for it, just as Christ did, but you aren't barred from heaven for protecting your today and tomorrow.

Go about your days with wisdom and prudence, aiming for mercy and generosity but knowing full well that it won't always flow from you.

But don't take these battles for health, for freedom, for an earthly future as the be all and end all. If they go poorly, if you end up hurt, if you're left spinning in your tracks and confused about what happened, what of it? You are still built upon Christ, you are still welcomed by the One who gives and gives and gives, and loves to give to you. You know that, as you fumble through your days, in the end you will be welcomed by the Father who is kind and merciful, all for the sake of Christ your Lord.

Amen.