



A Note from the Pastor's Corner

So, Osama bin Laden was killed – and people in the United States celebrated. That's understandable. And when it comes to the youth and college students showing their emotions in support of this event, that, too, is understandable. After all, from the time they were aware of the world at large, Osama bin Laden was one to be feared. The 9/11 event had been burned into their memory and was one of the formative events of their generation.

The discussions ('arguments' is probably more like it) about the impact of his death will go on for months – and, without doubt, will be highly politicized. Nothing can happen in our nation any more without professional political gas bags twisting things in whatever direction it takes to suite their ideology. But I don't even care about that.

What's on my mind is the fact that many Americans self-identify as being Christian. Keeping in mind that the word 'Christian' literally means "little Christ", being a Christian means having a commitment to being an apprentice to Jesus, our Master. I would be quite surprised if any Christian I know would object to that.

What seems to get lost in all the hallelujahs, amens, and saying of the Lord's Prayer on Sunday mornings is that being a Christian is not something we can do just part of the time. It isn't a label we can put on and take off as readily as we do a hat. Jesus-followers need to be striving for a full-time, 24/7 effort to become more and more like the Master.

This means not just on Sunday mornings – not just at home – and not just when we're around our closest friends. It also doesn't mean when it's easy and doesn't cost us a thing. As Jesus said, even evil persons feed their children. Becoming a disciple means that Jesus' nature must show in our words and deeds even when it's difficult – *especially* when it's difficult.

By "difficult", I mean not just attending Sunday morning worship fairly regularly or having a bumper sticker that says "Pray for Peace". Those things are easy. I mean letting the difficult words Jesus spoke sink into our being and change our attitude to the point that we will take a stand for the views that Jesus expressed – often to the dismay of those around him.

Maybe an example will help. "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." How often have we heard that directive? And what do we do with it when we hear it or read it? Ignore it? Convince ourselves that when it really matters, God will take over our being and force us to show love to our enemy beyond our own will? Do we tell ourselves we'll do so only when our enemy has apologized, begged forgiveness, and seems lovable?

How important is this? It may be the most vitally important thing there is for Christians. Why? Because when we have a raft of politicians and religious folk who take pleasure in loudly and constantly proclaiming to the world that ours is a Christian nation (which, by the way, it clearly is not, never has been, and was not designed to be), the actions we engage in as a nation are of eternal importance.

So when our nation engages in the torture of other human beings – and then tries to justify those actions – it is a slap in the face of Jesus. When our nation continues to commit murder by executing prisoners – it is a slap in the face of Jesus. When our nation initiates warfare – especially when it is done on false pretexts – it is a slap in the face of Jesus. And when our nation murders an enemy – especially when there are alternatives – it is a slap in the face of Jesus. What impression do you think the rest of the world has of Jesus because of what is done by our nation?

How many times are we expecting Jesus to turn his cheek? What opinion of him is the rest of the world forming of Jesus because of our actions? And when American citizens celebrate such actions in great numbers on the world stage, how can anyone scratch their heads in puzzlement about the decline of the Church in America? (Of course, there are always those who try to hide behind the claim that Jesus was only talking about our secret selves. If that were so, Jesus would have never been murdered.)

"Love your enemies." What do you think might happen if we actually did such a thing? I don't know if we ever tried it. Imagine, please, if Osama bin Laden had been captured, brought alive and unharmed to the United States, treated with dignity and respect (maybe similar to how our white collar criminals are treated), and had the love of Jesus demonstrated to him personally?

I think the main reason we cannot do this is because we don't even practice the "love your neighbor" in our everyday life. How could it be possible to live out the expectation of Jesus that we love our enemy – which requires a lot more commitment than loving our neighbor – when we fail to take seriously the much easier practice of loving those we live, work, play, and worship with?

Grace and peace, Pastor Bud