A Light Amongst Hatred

October 28, 2026

Epistle: Ephesians 4:7-13 | Gospel: John 15:17-25

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen.

I was reading this passage today with one of my hospice patients, and usually, after I read a passage, I'll talk a bit. I like to hear the sound of my own voice. Most pastors, I think, do to some extent.

But instead of talking this time, I asked first, "What does that gospel make you think about?" And I think I'm going to start doing that more often, because she mentioned something that I hadn't really thought on before, or at least hadn't thought important to talk about.

She said, "It doesn't seem so fair that there is so much hate." And she said, "It seems almost like it's saying that Christ brought hate. Why did he come if his coming would cause others to sin?" "If I had not come," it says, "and spoken to them, they would not have sinned."

I thought this was a very interesting point she was raising.

And it gave me what I thought was a beautiful opportunity to explain how Scripture sometimes words things in a way that at first seems counterintuitive to the message it's meant to bring.

So what does the gospel mean when it says, "If I had not come, they would not have sinned"? They would not have done wicked things if I had not come?

I was quick to clarify: it did not mean that sin was non-existent before Christ's coming. It did not mean that wickedness was non-existent before his coming. It did not mean that all were saved and now some will burn in hell because Christ had come.

What the passage instead means, the core of what it is getting at, is Christ's coming having elevated some of us into salvation, separating us from that morass. And that is where hate comes from. It's not that it didn't exist before; it's that we didn't know to call it hate. It didn't have a target to look at.

The whole world was immersed in darkness, and when some were lifted up into the light, well, now hate had a name and a face.

I remember a story told by one of my friends who once lived in the South. This was an elderly gentleman, and he had lived many years ago in a small town in Alabama. Now, in this town, only white people lived. You never heard a racial slur. You didn't have people going out and attacking others of a different race, because there were none there.

But he said that one day a Black family came to live in town. They had come there to work, and almost immediately, he said, it was like racism appeared overnight. The storefront the family owned was vandalized with racial slurs. People in the street would call out after the children when they were walking down the road.

In a way, hearing that story, it almost seems like that family's arrival caused hatred to appear and sin to rear its head. We, of course, know that's ridiculous. It wasn't the family's fault for moving to the town.

They did nothing wrong. They had every right to be there. The family didn't encourage it. They didn't instigate it.

And yet, my friend said, overnight, for the first time, he was introduced to racial slurs he didn't know existed. That hatred and sin already existed in the world, but it didn't have anyone to aim at. It's ridiculous to say that the Black family was somehow responsible for it or its origin. They were just visibly different from everyone else. And so the sin, the evil,

the wickedness already in others' hearts was brought to the surface.

It's the same way in today's gospel. It's not saying that because of Christ sin appeared. It's because of Christ that sin found a name and an appearance. It's not his fault, or his disciples' fault, that wickedness appeared around them. It was already there. It just didn't know who it was targeting.

For we read very carefully in the middle of the gospel, "If you had been of the world, the world would love its own." But we are not of the world. We are of Christ.

We as Christians are called to a radical mission of love, of charity, of truth. We are called to go out to the good and the bad and, without distinction, extend our hands and say, "I love you. God loves you."

And unfortunately, as we know, some people will hate us just for saying those three words.

When we stand up in defense of the weak and wounded, or when we are ourselves the weak and the wounded, reflect on how often the world pauses and has mercy, and how often it instead tries to pounce and collect and wound us.

I've had friends with whom I was perfectly congenial and friendly. We would go out to dinner. We'd spend evenings talking together. We'd have such a good time.

And then, the moment I would tell them, "I support the right of anyone to love who they want, regardless of gender," suddenly there would be exclusion, hatred, cruel words. An expression of support and love for someone living a life that they feel called to is met with hatred.

I didn't make that hatred. But by being someone who stood up for others, for radical Christian love and charity, I became a target of it.

You'll notice that on many of the Apostles' feast days, we wear red to celebrate their martyrdom.

To be a Christian is to be called against the currents of the world. It's to be called to make yourself a shining light which hate will come towards. It's not always fair or right.

But sometimes, by being a light amongst all the hate we might receive, maybe we'll help guide someone home to comfort and safety and love.

And what is more Christian than bringing love to anyone and everyone?

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost.