

Where There is Hatred, Let Me Sow Love



Christopher News Notes

*“Hatred paralyzes life; love releases it...
Hatred darkens life; love illumines it.”
— Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.*

LOVE IN THE FACE OF HATRED IS THE MOST TRANSFORMATIVE CONCEPT THE WORLD HAS EVER KNOWN. Where hatred causes only destruction, love has the power to build bridges between people and restore trust. But sometimes hatred can create an all-consuming downward spiral of events, with one evil deed inspiring another in return.

When confronted with persistent hate, it takes a tremendous amount of courage to show love to others. In the Sermon on the Mount,

Christ said, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven." How do we live by this command so that we can follow in Christ's footsteps and experience the joy that is eternal?

Facing Down Hate

"Hate, it has caused a lot of problems in the world, but it has not solved one yet." —Maya Angelou

On June 17, 2015, a 21-year-old white supremacist opened fire on a prayer group at the Emmanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in downtown Charleston, South Carolina. Nine people were killed, while only three survived. The shooter was apprehended the following day. That same week, a bond hearing was held where relatives of the victims had the opportunity to speak directly to the shooter. Their words stunned the entire nation.

"I forgive you," said Nadine Collier, whose mother had been killed, her voice breaking in sorrow. "You took something very precious from me. I will never talk to her again. I will never, ever hold her again. But I forgive you and have mercy on your soul." One at a time, others came forward with a similar message. "I acknowledge that I am very angry," said Bethane Middleton Brown, the sister of murder victim DePayne Middleton-Doctor, a minister at the church. "But one thing that DePayne always enjoined in our family...is she taught me that we are the family that love built. We have no room for hating, so we have to forgive."

In this moment of unspeakable sorrow, the families of the victims taught us all a lesson. They understood that to respond with hatred would destroy them from within. So they chose instead to hold onto the love they shared with those they lost, to keep that spirit alive within their hearts, and to remain united together with them in Christ.

Wanda Simmons, whose grandfather was killed in the massacre, said, "Although my grandfather and the other victims died at the hands of hate, everyone's plea for your soul is proof that they lived in

When Love Rules the Heart

In his book, *Saintly Solutions to Life's Common Problems*, Father Joseph Esper shares stories and bits of wisdom from the saints on Christ's call for us to choose love over hatred. In his *Admonitions*, St. Francis of Assisi wrote, "A man really loves his enemy when he is not offended by the injury done to himself, but for love of God feels burning sorrow for the sin his enemy has brought on his own soul, and proves his love in a practical way." And St. Augustine said, "If you are suffering from a bad man's injustice, forgive him, lest there be two bad men."

St. Ignatius of Loyola once had the entirety of his meager savings stolen. A few weeks later, he heard that the thief had fallen ill. It was wintertime and the man was 100 miles away, but Ignatius traveled that distance simply to nurse him back to health.

Another story tells of two thieves who stole oxen from Saint Philip of Zell. It was nighttime and the thieves got lost in the woods while trying to escape. In the morning, they discovered they had accidentally circled back and arrived at Philip's hermitage. The thieves begged Philip's forgiveness, and he granted them pardon. But he also made sure to feed them a good meal before sending them on their way.

Following in Christ's footsteps, these saints seized opportunities to demonstrate the power of love to those who had wronged them in order to win their lost souls for Christ. As Saint John of the Cross once said, "Where there is no love, pour love in, and you will draw out love."

love and their legacies will live in love. So, hate won't win."

Brave Enough to Respond with Love

"You must be the change you wish to see in the world." —Mahatma Gandhi

Lauren Casper was at the park with her five-year-old autistic son Mareto, when she saw a group of eight- and nine-year-old girls laughing at him because his diaper was showing. Casper felt "furious" that her son was being mocked. Mareto, however, didn't understand that the laughter was aimed at him, so he smiled, walked closer to the girls, and introduced himself. His innocent response quieted the girls down.

Writing a guest post on author Ann Voskamp's website, Casper admitted that she wanted to scold the girls, but she realized that approach would have just made them resentful and not changed their perspective: "But when Mareto simply introduced himself with kindness and a smile, the girls were baffled. I could tell they knew Mareto was

different, and that they felt a little guilty when they eventually walked away. But I could also tell they sort of liked him. That's what love does in the face of cruelty. It surprises, confuses, and then teaches."

Casper then reflected on our natural reactions of wanting to hurt others who hurt us, realizing that it simply perpetuates a cycle that gets spread from one person to the next: "I believe this is what Jesus was talking about when He said that the greatest commandment of all is to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind, and the second greatest commandment is to love everyone around us as much as we love ourselves. He finished by saying that everything—the law and all the prophets—hinges on us loving God and loving each other... Hurt keeps on filtering through everyone until someone stops it. There's only one answer that can break the cycle: love. Love holds us together, heals wounds, restores relationships, and changes things. The whole world hinges on us responding in love."

Love Triumphant

"The person who does not decide to love forever will find it very difficult to really love for even one day."

—Pope St. John Paul II

On July 12, 1986, New York City Police Officer Steven McDonald was shot in the line of duty by a 15-year-old assailant while on patrol in Central Park. Steven was 27 years old, and his wife, Patti Ann, was 23. They had been married for just eight months, and Patti Ann was three months pregnant with the son they would name Conor.

The shooting left Steven paralyzed from the neck down for the rest of his life. In an account he gave for Johann Christoph Arnold's book *Why Forgive*, Steven recounted a moment after the shooting when a surgeon informed them he would remain a quadriplegic: "[Patti Ann] collapsed to the floor, crying uncontrollably. I cried too, though I was locked in my body, and unable to move or to reach out to her."

But only a few days later, the media asked Patti Ann for a statement, and she stood before them, courageously proclaiming that she would trust God to do what was best for her family. Then, after Conor's birth, the couple went before the press together and revealed that Steven had forgiven the young man who tried to kill him. While the shooter was in prison, Steven wrote to him, and the McDonalds eventually got a phone call from the young man. He apologized to Steven, Patti Ann, and Conor, and they accepted his apology.

Steven became a speaker on nonviolent conflict resolution, traveling to Northern Ireland to talk about the power of love to triumph over hatred. He also shared his story with young people at New York area schools. Patti Ann became mayor of their small Long Island town, while also coaching a girls' basketball team and softball team with her husband.

On January 10, 2017, Steven passed into the next life. Dignitaries of the city gathered with his family, friends, and loved ones at St. Patrick's Cathedral to mourn their loss and commemorate his life. Conor, who followed in his father's footsteps to become a New York City police officer, offered a eulogy at the funeral Mass. Upon mentioning his mother, the entire congregation rose to their feet for sustained applause. In the time that had passed since the shooting, Patti Ann had emerged as an icon of love and fidelity. Of his parents, Conor said, "Their marriage was true love. My parents created the most phenomenal life out of such darkness."

In an interview conducted by The Christophers a few weeks after Steven's passing and published in *Catholic New York*, Patti Ann recalled the fulfillment Steven found in being a husband and father. "Oh, there was joy," Patti Ann said. "There was more joy than there was sorrow or sadness, honestly."

While a hateful act almost destroyed their family, love led them to understand how to triumph over hatred. Steven once said, "The only thing worse than receiving a bullet in my spine would have been to nurture revenge in my heart. Such an attitude would have extended my injury to my soul, hurting my wife, son, and others even more."

Steven credited Patti Ann's trust in God with saving his life, and she credited him with teaching her about heaven. She says, "In my mind Steven's already walking. I believe in my heart that Steven is no longer in pain, that he's free of the wheelchair and that he is happy."


**"It's better to light one candle
than to curse the darkness."**

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**"Hatred stirs up strife, but love
covers all offenses." —Psalm 10:12**