



The Quest for Creativity

Opening

What if our theology could get up from our armchairs and move into our world? That would be something worth paying attention to. This is The Armchair Anabaptist podcast.

<intro song> Lay your guns down, down on the floor. There ain't no good in those guns anymore. Take my hand and let me kiss your cheek. Let our friendship be sweet. <end>

"Because Mennonites have usually found that the way to faithfulness is to separate from others and eventually if only I am here, then at least I'll agree with myself."

"And I don't think that we can say we love someone and then shoot them. It doesn't make sense."

"I always tell folks that, 'Look at - if you're in a debate and winning the debate becomes more important than reflecting love towards the person you're debating, then do the Kingdom of God a great service and shut up.'"

"How do we encourage people to see nonviolence as something more than a position about war?"

"Because we're not just sitting around doing podcasts and theology, we're actually trying to live our lives as Christians."

<song> This is a reckoning between you and me. The righting of all wrongs as we eat and as we drink. <end>

Introduction

Kevin Wiebe: You're listening to The Armchair Anabaptist. This is our season finale, episode 16, The Quest for Creativity. I'm Kevin Wiebe.

Jesse Penner: And I'm Jesse Penner, and we are your hosts. Earlier in this season you might remember we took a look at Matthew 5 and some of Jesus's words about loving our enemies, maybe his clearest statements about this in scripture. Right before he makes these statements in Matthew 5:38-42, he introduces some very creative ways of dealing with enemies. So what we're looking at today, or at least what we're starting out with is what does this imply or teach us about what it means to love our enemies?

These stories about turning the other cheek, giving up our tunic, walking the extra mile, these are some of the stories that are most well known out of scripture, even people who aren't necessarily associated with the church sometimes use these sayings. But what was Jesus actually trying to get at here?

KW: These stories come from Matthew 5:38-42, and I'm going to read it for us so that we have this in the back of our minds as we go into this episode. This is from the New Living Translation.

“You have heard the law that says the punishment must match the injury: ‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say, do not resist an evil person! If someone slaps you on the right cheek, offer the other cheek also. If you are sued in court and your shirt is taken from you, give your coat, too. If a soldier demands that you carry his gear for a mile, carry it two miles. Give to those who ask, and don’t turn away from those who want to borrow.”

We have an excellent panel of guests today and a little bit longer of an episode today than usual. We'll be hearing from Pastor Brian Zahnd, from Betty Pries, from Dr. Layton Friesen and Dr. Terry Hiebert, as well as we'll be hearing once again from our interview from Dr. Ronald J. Sider from just before his passing in 2022.

What do Jesus' examples in Matthew 5 teach us about loving our enemies?

JP: We're going to start off here with Dr. Ronald Sider. He was the founder and President Emeritus of Evangelicals for Social Action. He was distinguished Professor of Theology, Holistic Ministry, and Public Policy at Palmer Theological Seminary, and he was the author of numerous books, including *The Early Church on Killing, If Jesus is Lord, and Nonviolent Action*. We talked about this passage in Matthew 5 with Dr. Sider. He gave a great response. Here he is talking about turning the other cheek.

Dr. Ronald J. Sider: Before I talk specifically about those three instances, I wanted to say that Jesus is clearly rejecting what was common wisdom. He says, “it's been said, ‘an eye for an eye and a tooth for the tooth,’” that was the very centre of Old Testament jurisprudence, the very centre not just of the Hebrews, the Israelites, but of other codes that we know from that time. And in some ways that was an effort to prevent... If somebody hits me and knocks out a tooth, you know, I knock out all of their teeth. It was an attempt to prevent that, but it was an explicit command for Israelite Old Testament jurisprudence to say an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Jesus says no, he's rejecting the centre of Old Testament civil law. That, I think, makes me even surer that his love for enemies is a radical sort of thing that he intends for us to follow.

But of the three examples, if someone slaps you on one cheek turn the other... Some scholars, and I'm not absolutely certain this is the case, but I think it's very plausible. Some scholars say that Jesus says “if somebody slaps you on the right cheek turn the other also.” Now if you think of two people facing each other the way you can hit the person on the right cheek is with the back of the hand and that was what happened at that time and it was the kind of insulting way

that a master would deal with a slave or an inferior, or a husband with a wife or so on. And Jesus doesn't say, "just accept it." He says "turn the other cheek" and when you do that you have to hit with your fist and hit the left cheek and that's treating the person as an equal, so Jesus is calling on the person who's being abused to insist on his dignity, but nonviolently.

KW: Betty Pries is the CEO and senior consultant of a mediation company called Creedence and Co. She's an instructor in the conflict management program at Conrad Grebel University College, and she is the author of the book called *The Space Between Us*. We also asked Betty this question about how to respond to Matthew 5:38-42. This is what Betty had to say about that passage.

Dr. Betty Pries: It's a good question. So let me just go through these examples a little bit. Some people in that time of history would have had two cloaks, their under-cloak and their over-cloak. If somebody takes your over-cloak and the text says "well, then give them the other one too." It means that you would stand there naked. Right, because now you have given both of your cloaks away. And in that culture, if somebody sees you naked, it doesn't shame you, it shames them. And so it's very interesting that basically that passage says go be naked and with the recognition that when you end up standing there naked, those people who are seeing you, they're the ones who are kind of shamed by that experience.

There's an interesting example actually in that part of the world from somewhere in the last 50 years, where soldiers were coming in to attack a village and the women went to the outside of the village and they just undressed and the soldiers ran away because it was shameful for them to see a naked woman. And so it's an example of a very creative response, also very biblical response, that made sense in that context.

KW: Our conversation with Betty continued and she gave numerous examples to illustrate these points.

BP: So in history, I mean we have lots of examples, if you look especially to Gandhi and Martin Luther King Junior, we have examples of very creative responses to injustice that invited the people in power to wake up to the ways in which they are harming various groups in society.

In terms of our in our personal lives, we don't have lots of big examples from people's personal lives on how they turn the other cheek, but I think we can take from this that, let's say, my friend and I are having a conflict or my husband and I or whoever. How am I in this conversation, practicing deep, deep grace and also inviting the other person to see how their actions are impacting me and waking them up to how they're impacting me.

I'm thinking about a workplace that I once worked at where a number of staff, this was a group of nurses, they were really struggling with one of their colleagues and they saw this person as awful, awful, awful. And I said, well, have you tried talking to her about this? They said, "well, we can't, we were trained to turn the other cheek." This was not a Christian workplace, this was just a regular old workplace. They said that they had been trained to turn the other cheek and I

said, “well, what does it mean to turn the other cheek?” And what they thought was turning the other cheek just meant lying down, so to speak, and letting this person walk all over them.

And we went back and forth for a while and I taught them what the real meaning of turning to the cheek was, and then I said if you are only kind to this woman, you are permissive. If you are only honest with this woman, you're brutal. And so one of the things I think you're wrestling with is this struggle. You want to turn to the cheek, but that means that you're feeling like you're being permissive, and then you jump over and you want to be honest but then you know you're being brutal. So, is there a way of being honest and kind at the same time?

Because if you're only kind, you're permissive. If you're only honest, you're brutal. So how do you do both of these at the same time? And I brainstormed with them and many things were too hard for them to try, but what they came up with was they were going to try saying to their colleague – because one of things that was happening was that their colleague was regularly putting them down, and so they were going to say to her just this phrase: “that is not a very nice thing to say.” It was kind. It was honest. We practiced it and it made a difference.

It made a difference because they weren't mean to her, they were kind, turning the other cheek, they were honest, also turning on the cheek and when they put those two things together. It sounds ridiculous really, but when I met with her – they tried this a few times – and when I met with her, she was really awakened to something was shifting and she wasn't sure what and I was coaching her through it and it helped. I guess the point that I'm making is if I take those passages from Matthew and translate them into our regular day-to-day life in church or home or work, one of the ways of translating that is to say if I need to have a conversation with the other, can I do it in a way that's both kind and honest? Because really, that's what Matthew 5 is doing, it's inviting us to be both kind and honest.

JP: Pastor Brian Zahnd is the founding pastor of Word of Life Church in St. Joseph, MO, and is the author of ten books, including *A Farewell to Mars*. His most recent book is *When Everything's on Fire*. Pastor Zahnd also addressed these verses and talked about Jesus' call to go the extra mile and what that means.

Brian Zahnd: Yeah, that is very creative what Jesus is doing there, he's not saying “just don't retaliate.” He does say that, I mean, that's there, but you are asserting your own agency. So I mean, you know this, this is real-life context, some of this. The Romans said, look, if a Roman soldier wants you to carry his baggage, you have to do it, but it will be reasonable. We'll say you only have to do it for one mile. One Roman mile and so that was kind of the law that a Roman soldier in an occupied nation. Hey, you, buddy. Carry my bag. All right, then. You have to. I mean, he's got the sword, he's got the power. But the Roman government says, “yeah, but you can only make him carry it one mile.” When you carry it the second mile, think about it, I mean just put yourself in that situation. So you're a Jew. You're occupied by this foreign, military superpower, this Roman soldier says “hey, Kevin, carry my bag a mile.” OK. You carried a mile. You reach the mile marker and you say. You know what? I'll carry it for you another mile.

That just throws everything off balance, you know. Like what? What? Well, you know, maybe you say because you know you want somebody to carry your bag. I'm trying to help you out here. You want someone to carry your bag. OK, you can make me carry it one mile, I'll carry it two. And you see how there's a shift in the power dynamic, but none of it is based upon any kind of violence. I think you just have to play with it. You see that, that Jesus is enabling people to maintain their own dignity. But not through just the barbaric way of "you hit me, I'm gonna hit you back." You know, "you hit me. OK. Do you like that? Do you wanna hit me again? Go ahead. I'm not going to hit you back. Go ahead." That changes things. You want my coat, I'll give you my shirt.

That really throws the perpetrator off balance because they're prepared for violent retaliation. And you know, they're ready for that. When they are met with this creative expression of the sense of love and forgiveness, then they're not quite sure what to do with that. And that's part of the genius of the parable of the Good Samaritan. You know, Jesus is telling this to a Jewish audience and in response to a Torah scholar's question about "well, yeah, but who is my neighbour?" We know that God tells us to love our neighbour, but who is my neighbour and then.. I'm not gonna tell the story. The Good Samaritan. You know it, but the real creative part of that, it's not just Jesus saying... I mean, Jesus could have told the parable where you have a Jewish hero, a Jew coming to the aid of a Samaritan victim. Say, oh, you know can we Jews treat our, you know, our vilified enemy the Samaritans with love? Jesus could have told it that way. And you kind of get OK, that's something to aspire to. But Jesus does something much more subversive. He casts the Samaritan as the one who is showing unconditional love. And so the question really becomes, what are you going to do when your enemy loves you? That's even more creative than you saying love your enemy. Jesus is taking it a step further and really messing with people saying, what are you going to do when your enemy loves you? How are you going to respond to that?

JP: Dr. Layton Friesen is the Academic Dean at Steinbach Bible College and the author of the book *Secular Nonviolence and the Theo Drama of Peace*. While our first several panellists addressed these verses, they had a pretty similar idea about what Jesus was getting at, and this sort of subversive action that was taken through them. Dr. Friesen had some pushback on this idea.

Dr. Layton Friesen: So there's been a fair bit of discussion about this in Mennonite theology in the last 50 years, because I think what we have tried to do in Mennonite theology is get away from anything that looks like passivity, anything that looks like we're just asking people to be doormats and be abused and whatever. So Mennonites have tried to understand loving your enemies in ways that are more active and more assertive and that are more conducive to the dignity of human beings. And I think that's a good thing.

I have a bit of a bone to pick with some of the ways in which that has been done. There's one scholar by the name of Walter Wink who has made arguments like this and in some ways, this is a very attractive way of interpreting Jesus' words. I haven't been completely convinced by

Walter Wink on this. I'm just not sure that we know that much about social customs in the Middle East at that time that we know exactly what was meant by a slap with the right hand or a punch with the left and so forth. And then in the Gospel of Luke, where Jesus makes the same statement, he doesn't use anything about the right hand or the left. He just says if someone slaps you on one cheek turn the other cheek, which leads me to believe that Luke did not see this as referring to certain understandings in the culture about left-handed slaps and right-handed insults and so forth.

But what I think we can take from this passage is that the translation that we have, I think it's from the King James where it says "do not resist the evildoer" probably doesn't capture what Jesus is getting at here. Later on in Matthew 18 for example, Jesus is going to give very explicit instructions about how to resist an evildoer through the method that he gives there. What I think he rightly means here in Matthew 5:39 would be better translated "do not set yourselves against an evildoer," or "do not take revenge on an evildoer," or "do not repay evil with evil," which is kind of how Paul translates Jesus' words, "do not repay evil with evil."

And so I think the idea that Jesus is getting at here is don't use the same evil strategies that you see your abuser using, don't use those same evil strategies to get even with your abuser. Don't sink to your abuser's level of evil, and I think the temptation is always to fight fire with fire, to use violence to resist violence. But I think Jesus is saying do not use evil to overcome evil.

Now the further thing that I would say about this and this is just a general statement about a lot of Jesus' instructions to what we would call maybe weaker groups or minority groups or oppressed groups in the Bible (and this goes for Paul's teachings as well as Jesus' teaching) is that when Jesus addresses someone like a slave or someone who is being abused, or when Paul talks about slaves, or about women, or about people who are being persecuted by their own government when he addresses them, he is addressing them as moral agents who are capable of making decisions. And so when Jesus is here addressing a person who is being struck, or a person who is being robbed, he's actually addressing them as somebody who can make moral choices, who actually has some agency, some freedom, some ability to chart their path here in terms of how they are going to respond. And that's giving dignity to somebody who is being abused. It's saying, "you're not a complete doormat here. You're not a complete victim here, who can't do anything, and poor you." No, you have dignity, you have a certain amount of power and humanity within yourself, you can make some choices, and those choices will show that you are my disciple.

So I think that is how Jesus gives dignity to the people who are being oppressed here, simply by asking them to do something that's just incredibly, incredibly difficult that can only be done with the power of God's spirit within them. That would be how I understand that passage.

KW: As we discussed this passage in Matthew 5 with Dr. Sider, it seemed to suggest that when we respond to violence, Jesus is asking us to respond in creative ways. I asked Dr. Sider if he thought we lacked that same creativity today. This is what he had to say.

RS: Well, I think the many examples that I talked about in my book *Nonviolent Action*, whether it's the Poles fighting communist dictatorship or the Filipinos fighting Marcos with nonviolence or Gandhi or Martin Luther King, they're using creative ways to insist on their dignity and insist on what the government, the dictator or whatever the people in power are doing is wrong but doing it while they still love that enemy. So I think the whole spirit of nonviolent direct action fits with what I suggested is probably Jesus' statements about those three cases.

KW: Dr. Terry Hiebert is the president of Steinbach Bible College and in our conversation with him, he talked about how sometimes when we get into these conversations, it can be difficult for people to just talk about theology or ideas, and how sometimes talking about stories is much more powerful. This is the story that Dr. Hiebert shared.

Dr. Terry Hiebert: And so in class, I pull out a TED talk by Jeffrey Brown on the Boston miracle, I love that one. Jeffrey Brown was a young pastor in a crime-ridden community with lots of drugs, violence and youth dying regularly, and he was personally affected by the death of a couple of young teenagers, I think in his community. And he's doing funerals for these kids. And they're like, what in the world should I be doing here? Some might react to say, well, we should just get tough on crime and put more people in prison. You know, if they're in prison, then at least let's clean up the streets and that's how we do it. But Jeffrey decided that he was going to – he didn't say this – but he's going to imitate Christ and he's going to show compassion and mercy. And he discovered that most of the crimes took place at night, but most of his ministry in the church was, of course, during the daytime.

So he decided to start walking the streets at night simply to get to know the youth in the community. And at first, they thought the guy in the collar was quite suspicious and they're going what's he up to and so on. And once they found out that he was not threatening, he wasn't carrying a gun, that he just wanted to listen and he cared about them personally, they started coming and talking to him and he discovered that they had just ordinary fears, like everybody else. That they had really difficult home situations and they had desperation in their lives that they were dealing with.

And in a radical move rather than coming to them with answers, he asked them what they thought needed to happen in this community in order to make this community a better place to live, and they had no shortage of answers to tell him. And so he engaged with them. He had police officers come in and listen to them, and community service workers listening to these people talk. And they began working out solutions for reducing the violence in this community. And the crime rate went down significantly.

So he decided to share his model with other communities across America and they found similar results. The people he thought were enemies were actually the very people who were needed to bring about the solution without even using violence or more police force or whatever it was. It's a dramatic story and encourage you to watch it. It's easy to find.

But it's one example again of someone who basically gets down to basics and says, "these my enemies, so to speak, are the human beings who have some desperate needs, have a need, need somebody to minister to them and serve them."

I've heard something similar from a ministry leader in the North End of Winnipeg, say at an SBC Chapel that walking throughout his community with a gun was more dangerous than walking throughout his community without one. Even if guns are a last resort, if we possess them they often become the next resort. If we don't have them then creativity and relying on the spirit of God as our first resort for trying to solve these threatening issues is our best answer. And I think Jeffrey Brown is a great example.

I realize that in this world you will have police forces and militaries, but we as Christians, as Anabaptists, need to realize that our first call is what God has called us to be first. We are called first to be the body of Christ and if the head did not resort to lethal violence, and gave his life as a ransom for many, then what gives the body the right to be different from the head?

JP: Uh, that was good to listen to those discussions and stories. I feel like we had a great sort of interplay, a few different directions on these things. We had a little bit of debate here, really over whether Walter Wink's premise that these verses in the Sermon on the Mount are kind of subversive tools that we can use in order to sort of fight for justice without using violence, whether that is something that's actually there or whether these are actually simply just verses to sort of lay down our arms and step away from what we have rights to or what we're owed and simply love our enemies.

KW: To wink or not to wink, that's the question.

I think sometimes I've wondered about that when I think about Walter Wink's work. Do we understand it that way or not? And I think part of it comes back to, do we look at this as something that must be effective or do we look at this as simply part of our call, whether it's effective or not? Because if it has to be effective then of course something about seeing how it will subvert injustice and restore dignity will really help us to understand the why behind it and will help us to be creative in different ways in the here and now. If it's more so about faithfulness then it's not quite as important that, that kind of perspective is right. Then we're going to be doing this even if we don't quite understand why we're doing what we're doing, just that we know Jesus calls us to this.

JP: Right. It's part of the bigger picture of Christianity in general. It's how much of what we are doing is because we think it's going to be better for us in this life materially here and now and how much of what we are doing is because we are simply seeking to be faithful to Jesus. And I think it's clear that that needs to come first. Our first priority is simply faithfulness, and the rest follows.

KW: And I think there's a piece of it too, no matter which perspective we embrace, that calls us to something beyond just demanding our own way, but that Jesus is challenging us, in fact, to

consider the good of other people, that no matter what situation we're finding ourselves in, and no matter if we embrace Walter Wink's work or not, that Jesus is inviting us to consider not only our own good but also the good of our enemy as well in this. Not only consider our own rights but to think about, "hey, maybe I can do good in someone else's life even in this situation where I've been harmed." And to think about ourselves, not only as someone being victimized by someone else, but actually as someone who can be empowered to do good to someone else in the midst of those circumstances which is actually a very powerful thing.

JP: One more thing, I think we should touch on before we head into our break and on to the next question is the power of story. This is something that came up in a few of the responses that we got. Pastor Brian Zahnd talked about sort of the provocative nature of the story of the Good Samaritan and how Jesus told that story in a way that was designed to sort of raise the eyebrows of those who are listening and really force them to grapple with some serious truths about what it means to be a good person and to love our enemy. In addition, Dr. Terry Hiebert talked about some stories that he has told in his classes and how often stories can be much more powerful in terms of communicating our values and what's important to us than simply speaking about them straight up.

KW: If you're listening and you want to read about a lot of stories of effective nonviolent action, check out Ronald J. Sider's book that is called *Nonviolent Action*. It is a chronicle of stories from around the world where people made concrete changes in their world in ways that did not engage in violence. It's a great book that is just full of a lot of these kinds of stories that are in fact very inspiring.

Within our denomination, the Evangelical Mennonite Conference, there are a variety of different theological perspectives around this issue of loving our enemies. So as we close out this season we wanted to ask this question: what is the bottom line? What is true for all Christians at all times, everywhere? We asked this question of Dr. Ronald J Sider and this is what he had to say.

What is true for all Christians at all times everywhere?

RS: If Christians believe what the church has taught for 2000 years, namely that Jesus the Messiah is true God as well as true man, if that's who he is we simply cannot say "sorry, Jesus, that's what you said but it's too hard. We can't do it. It doesn't work in our kind of world." I think the bottom line is: who we think Jesus is? And if we are clear that the carpenter from Nazareth who rose from the dead was truly God and man, truly human and divine, then we simply can't tell him as Reinhold Niebuhr did, Niebuhr said "yes, the kind of total pacifism is what Jesus was talking about but sorry, Jesus, it doesn't work in the real world." We can't do that if Jesus is true God as well as true men.

JP: In talking with Dr. Layton Friesen, we asked the same question. When we think about the worldwide church and all of its various positions on peace, what is the bottom line in terms

of how we should think about Jesus's call to enemy love? He talked about the ways in which we're actually coming closer together on some of these things.

LF: I would make the arguments, and others have as well, that in the modern world with modern warfare there is increasingly less difference between somebody who believes in the just war tradition and somebody who is an out-and-out pacifist, who just rejects participation in war. Especially when you're talking about weapons of mass destruction which is now increasingly becoming common in all kinds of countries.

When you're talking about the use of nuclear weapons it's really, really hard to make the case that there is some kind of just war criteria that is guiding this kind of warfare. And so I think it's that I think the day is coming when people who reject all war and have always rejected participating in war, like Mennonites, and those who actually hold to just war principles that are supposed to chastise war and keep it within certain limits and only use it within certain means and keep it proportional and not allow it to kill civilians and all this kind of... there's a whole tradition there of thinking on how to how to limit war in order for it to be used for just means, I think there is a time that's coming very soon when those two are going to come together and they're going to both say if it's a modern war fought with modern weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear war, well, I don't see how any Christian who abides by either the just or tradition or the pacifist tradition can participate in this.

I sometimes wonder whether there is actually going to be more unity in the Christian Church over war in the future than there has in the past simply because of the way war has evolved. It's just not an activity that can be regulated the way it used to be. And so that's maybe the first thing I would say. I think even in a practical way, there can be some common ground on this.

But the other thing that I think is common is that we all need to recognize, and I think all churches do recognize, that Jesus calls us to love our enemy. That is just the inescapable words that he teaches us and he gives us very few ways of kind of wiggling out from underneath that or evading that central Christian teaching. That seems to be a basic Christian posture that he expects us to live and so I think that's where we can agree. Yes, this is what Jesus has taught us to do and we need to think, we need to struggle, we need to work at finding ways to do that and to make that come true in our lives. So, what kind of churches do we need to be?

This is a wonderful question, and I think people like Stanley Hauerwas have been pushing the church to ask what kind of people do we need to be? What kind of practices do we need to engage in? What kind of life do we need to have, as churches, that make war silly, that make war incomprehensible to us, that make it just unimaginable that we would kill our enemy? Not that this will be eradicated from the world forever, but what kind of a community would we have to be for that not to even make sense anymore? And that's what we need to think about.

Across our denominations, we are all against violence. Nobody wants killing. Nobody wants the plunder and the bloodshed and the chaos that war brings. And so what can we do as churches to decrease the appetite for this kind of stuff? Because let's face it, in the last 100 years, much,

much bloodshed has happened in the war between Christians. Between German Christians and British Christians and French Christians and Canadian Christians and American Christians, and so on, we are the ones who have fought each other and killed each other by the hundreds of thousands. And so even if Christians, the ones who have been baptized, who take the Lord's Supper, who consider themselves followers of Jesus, even if Christians across the spectrum would just agree that we will not kill other Christians, we're not going to kill our brothers and sisters who have been baptized and who are participating with us in the Lord's Supper and who we plan to be with in heaven. We're not going to kill those people. You would make a serious dent in the world's appetite and capacity for war. That's what I believe and I think we have much that we can unite around there.

Even if in the final end, we disagree on whether finally a person has to resist any use of force or violence at the end of the day, and we will always have both discussions. It's been a vexing issue for 2000 years, and the church has never quite solved that but we have to keep struggling with the words of Jesus and the example of Jesus and of Jesus' plan to restore the world through nonviolent love.

KW: Pastor Brian Zahnd also responded to this question. What is the bottom line for all Christians of every theological leaning?

BZ: I think we have to understand that the Kingdom of God is real. That we actually, in our baptism, have been transferred from the Kingdom of Darkness into the Kingdom of Light. That we have a new citizenship.

I'm going to come up with a fantastical illustration here. Let's say, this is a long time ago, I'm 25 years old and I have just obtained Swiss citizenship. That's where my family comes from. I've become a Swiss citizen and moved to Switzerland and renounced my American citizenship and America then goes to war with whoever. And they want to conscript me into the army, I say "no, no, no, no, no, I'm. I don't even belong. No, I'm. I'm not even a U.S. citizen anymore. I'm a Swiss citizen." I'm making this illustration up as I go and I'm fumbling around with it, I've never used this before, so maybe I'll leave off with the illustration because we'll run into problems.

The Kingdom of God has to be real enough that we understand that we have pledged our allegiance to it, and if we can go through life with dual citizenship as an American citizen and a citizen of the Kingdom of Christ without conflict, I mean generally without conflict, well, good for you. Wonderful. Isn't that great? But if there comes a conflict, we must always give priority to our citizenship which is from the heavens. When Jesus is standing before Pilate. You know, part of this, he knows enough to know that lying behind the arrest of Jesus is religious issues for the Sanhedrin. Pilate doesn't care about religious issues. He just doesn't care so he's a ruthless Roman, he's going right to the heart of the matter, "so are you the king of the Jews?" And Jesus says, "you say so, but my Kingdom is not from this world." That is, it doesn't come from this system of violent power. "If my Kingdom were from this world," he says, "my servants would be

fighting.” So we belong to a Kingdom where the servants of our Lord eschew fighting. It's just not something that we engage in.

Now again when I speak like this I'll get challenged, somebody will cook up some fantastical scenarios, saying “what would you do there.” I don't know. What I'm saying, though, is I'm certainly not going to enlist and say send me the other side of the world to go fight people, go kill people that actually, I don't have any quibble with. I mean, I don't know them. They're over there. I live here, but my government says no, we're going to send you over there. We're going to send you to Iraq. We're going to send you to Afghanistan. We're going to send you over there and you need to go kill those people because they're bad guys. And that's where I think our Kingdom identity kicks in and says, “yeah, and I don't do that.”

The real issue here is, is our Kingdom identity at least as real as our national citizenship? And I think for most Christians, the answer is actually no, it's not. But that's the problem.

JP: When we talked with Betty Pries about this same question, what is the core of this? What is the bottom line when it comes to enemy love, that as we close out a season like this, people should leave with, this is what she said.

BP: I think for me at least, the bottom line is just really found in that word love. I want to maybe expand on that a little bit. In the 20th century there was a psychologist named Carl Rogers who was a therapist and he said if somebody came to him for therapy and he responded with judgment, change was impossible, but if he responded to the person coming to therapy with unconditional positive regard, anything was possible. And I think about that with loving our enemies even you know in times of war. Can I regard the other with unconditional positive regard? That doesn't mean I can't hold boundaries, but can I deeply love the humanity of the other?

And when I think about, you know, our warfares small and large, over the course of our histories as nations in this world, so often we go to the place of hate. We will hate that country. We will hate the people of that country, we will hate that leader, or we will hate the people who support that leader?

We see this both in the justice community and in the warring community. We see this in those who are promoting war, we see this where peacemakers can sometimes hate whoever it is that's perceived as not allowing for peace in a particular community. The inclination to justify hate is deep within the human. And I think at the end of the day one of the most profound, and I think provocative messages of the gospel is this idea that you can love people. You can see beyond what people do and see this kernel of humanity in every person. Can we deeply honour, deeply love the humanity, the God-given humanity of each single person that we encounter? Engaging the other with unconditional positive regard, unconditional love?

There's a saying that we change because God loves us, not in order to win God's love and the same kind of holds true in our work. People change because we love them, not in order to win our love.

Now, that doesn't mean we don't hold boundaries. Loving the other includes holding boundaries. Otherwise, it doesn't help people to be their best selves. So loving does not mean we don't hold boundaries. At the end of the day, I keep coming back to this over and over and over again: how can I practice unconditional positive regard for this person even as I pray for this person to be transformed? To me, that's pivotal and I think that's key across the board.

KW: We asked Betty if she had any final thoughts, she wanted to leave us with.

BP: Well, I was just thinking about this question that we were just discussing. It's so tempting, it's so easy to be deluded. You know the world is warring in Ukraine. The world has been warring in Afghanistan for a long time, and other parts of the world. And I am deeply opposed to the war in Ukraine and I know that it is so tempting to see the world just through the lens that I've been given and not to see the humanity of the other. The human inclination to hate and to self-justify our hatred is so deep, and it makes us vulnerable to being laughed at when we go to the place of love. It makes us vulnerable to be for people to say "you don't make any sense."

I have been listening, talking with a friend, a theologian in Germany, over these last number of weeks related to the war in Ukraine and how does one imagine a nonviolent response to that war. It doesn't make logical sense. But he would say, as a Christian, he can do no other. Loving our enemies doesn't make logical sense. Not in a human condition. Not in the human condition that is part of all of us, which is so tempted to go to the place of anger and hate. The commitment to nonviolence and to loving our enemies doesn't make us superheroes. But it might just make us faithful.

JP: Wow, I can't think of a better way, a better final word to leave our podcast on than that.

KW: Amen.

Our feature song today is by Dane Joneshill, his song Long Way Around.

Long Way Around, Dane Joneshill

Hard to live in a little town. Talk is cheap, but it goes around
when judge and jury look just like your neighbours.
He had it all, except honesty, went to church three times a week,
oh, a good man in the worst sense I think the phrase is.

But he made a practice of lookin' right and fooled everyone except his wife
who saw behind the suit into the sickness.
She woulda' stayed, she woulda' tried. She got scared when she realized
the lengths a man will go to for addiction.

The cops showed up around Christmas time and they threw him down in the snow.
No one cares about your sins till you can't hide 'em anymore.
And the New Year found him weepin' on a cold county jailhouse floor.
He looked up when he heard the word of a prophet in the cell next door.

We're all takin' the long way round.
We're all takin' the long way round.
Even if you lost your way, don't let it get you down
because we're all takin' the long way around.

She left home around 17 all grown up or so she thinks.
Says a girl better live while she's alive.
As Mama kissed her baby girl she whispered
"It's a big, hard world, but I guess you'll have to learn the same way as I."

Took the job that she could find. Said "A woman's gotta compromise
if she's going to get anywhere in this life"
It was more than just a compromise, more like human sacrifice
and she laid down on the altar every night.

And the years rolled by like water but the nights dammed up the flow.
In the morning she'd pass by the mirror, 21 never looked so old.
Mama showed up around Christmas time and looked her straight in the soul.
Said, "Baby, it's been a hard road but I'll tell you one thing I know."

We're all takin' the long way round.
We're all takin' the long way round.
I know you keep fallin' down
you're gonna make it to the end somehow
We're all takin' the long way around

We're all takin' the long way round.
We're all takin' the long way round.
Fly on the wings of angels
or you're crawlin' on the ground
We're all takin' the long way around

Closing

The Armchair Anabaptist is a Theodidaktos podcast and Theodidaktos is a publication of the Evangelical Mennonite Conference.

You can check us out online at www.thearmchairanabaptist.ca and find us on iTunes, Spotify, and wherever podcasts are found.

A special thanks to our guests who joined us today, that was Pastor Brian Zahnd, Betty Pries, Dr. Layton Friesen, and Dr. Terry Hiebert. We were also honoured to be able to interview Dr. Ronald J. Sider in April of 2022, just a few months before his passing, and what you heard of him today was from that interview.

Our intro song is First Communion by Dane Joneshill and our feature song today was Long Way Around by Dane Joneshill.

Our executive producer is Erica Fehr, our producer and audio engineer is Kevin Wiebe and our administrative assistant and wizard of all things web related is Ruth Block. I'm Kevin Wiebe.

And I'm Jesse Penner and we have been your hosts for The Armchair Anabaptist. We certainly hope that what you have heard today will do more than stay as merely food for thought but that it can help inspire each of us to get up out of the comfort of our armchairs and translate into living more like Jesus.

Thank you so much for joining us this episode and this season for The Armchair Anabaptist as we have explored the life of peace and what it means to love our enemies.

Stay tuned for a bonus episode yet to come and remember to check out our website at www.thearmchairanabaptist.ca to keep up to date on our plans for next season.

Thank you so much for listening to The Armchair Anabaptist.

**Edited for clarity.*