14th September 2025

Hate

"If you hate your enemies, you will contract such a vicious habit of mind, as by degrees will break out upon those who are your friends, or those who are indifferent to you."

Joseph Addison, *The Spectator (1711)*

The killing of the Republican activist, Charlie Kirk, in the US prompts me to write this. In Act I of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice,* Shylock and Bassanio are together when Antonio enters. As an aside, Shylock says:

How like a fawning publican he looks!
I hate him for he is a Christian,
But more for that in low simplicity
He lends out money gratis and brings down
The rate of usance here with us in Venice.
If I can catch him once upon the hip,
I will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him.

If Shylock can't hate Antonio for one thing, he'll find another fault to fuel his hatred. Christian? Fawning look? Low simplicity? Lending money with no interest? *Any* grudge will do, to justify Shylock's hatred of this man.

Hate is a powerfully destructive emotion. From kids who fall out in the school playground to potentates through the ages who wage war because of their hatred of another nation, or region, or tribe, or class. But, if we're honest, hatred can be in us too. I once visited a much-loved aunt, and we had a pleasant conversation over supper. Later in the evening, we settled down to watch a football match on TV. Glasgow Celtic were playing in a European tie. My aunt was a Rangers fanatic, and had a life-long antithesis to Celtic, their arch-rivals. With Celtic being the only Scottish team in the European competition, I thought she might put the rivalry to one side and root for Scotland. But no! She was gripping the arms of her chair with white knuckles, muttering, "I hate them! I don't care which team beats Celtic, because I hate them! I hate them!"

Let's be careful where hatred takes us. In Joseph Addison's words from 300 years ago: "If you hate your enemies, you will contract such a vicious habit of mind" you might even end up hating your friends, or *even* those who're indifferent to you. When we feel hatred, let's pause and ask ourselves: What will this achieve? What destructiveness might it lead to?

A prayer for today

"Love your enemies" and "Turn the other cheek". I wonder who said that?

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