



*Eric Muhr*

I live in the town where I was born, and I work as a youth pastor, a writing professor, a middle school yearbook adviser. I'm interested in experimental community, progressive theology, wild places, quiet spaces, and small-time adventure. Back in junior high, I was nicknamed The Brain.

*BIBLE READING: John 15:18-27*

In ninth grade, there was a boy who hated me. And because of the alphabetical seating assignments our teachers used, he sat beside me or behind me in every class. In geography, when the teacher was distracted, he would kick me. In PE, he ran alongside me and pinched the insides of my arms. Once, he crushed my homework binder. But the worst part was the nonstop barrage of whispered nicknames he'd made up for me. I remember the sense of heaviness entering school each day, the sense that I was in bondage. To hatred.

I read Jesus' words in this passage, and that's what I feel. Unfair, unearned, unending hatred.

Jesus is clear. Hatred is sin. I know this from experience, as the hatred I endured was demeaning. Dehumanizing. An emergency intervention by a school counselor and a schedule change in the last quarter of that year might be what saved me from completely disappearing. Or from hating in return.

Jesus, too, was "hated without reason" (v. 25). We can know that the hate we experience helps us to empathize with Jesus. It doesn't seem like much, but this, too, is a part of what saved me. I remembered that Jesus loves those who hate him.

Then, in a tenth grade chemistry class, when no other student was willing to be this boy's lab partner, I volunteered. We worked together that year, and I learned a lot in our discussions about his deep sense of inadequacy. Of his own bondage to hatred.

I did not ask to be hated. But in choosing not to hate in return, I received a gift.

*SONG: O the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Help us, Jesus, to love those who hate us.*

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