

RCL preachers: This is the one shot "love your enemies" has in five years.

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

February 20, 2014

I don't usually write about preaching or about specific *Revised Common Lectionary* texts, since that's [well covered elsewhere on the site](#) by people more qualified than I. This is just a quick note motivated by the fact that [this Sunday's](#) Gospel reading is the subject of one of the more startling RCL factoids that came up when I was reporting [my fall article on alternate lectionaries](#). An excerpt from that piece:

[Eric Lemonholm's] criticism [of the RCL] echoes others: "missing and disconnected texts."

Lemonholm's most striking example is "love your enemies." The RCL actually assigns both Matthew's version of that text and Luke's. But in both cases it's slated for the seventh Sunday after Epiphany, one of the Ordinary cycle's odd benchwarming weeks—used only when the liturgical calendar's stars align. Week seven didn't make it into the Year A or C calendar between 2001 and 2011. "A ten-year absence of Jesus' command to love our enemies occurred," says Lemonholm, "during the first ten years of the war on terror."

This Sunday, "love your enemies" is back in the lineup. But [Luke's week seven](#) was benched last year and will sit out again in 2016, so this week is the only time this particular [double tradition](#) saying will get the nod in a five-year span.

All of which is to say: if you're preaching or planning worship this week at a church that follows the RCL strictly, please resist the temptation to focus primarily on Leviticus or 1 Corinthians. Give us "love your enemies," because we badly need it—and while the text may strike us professional Christians as overfamiliar, those who encounter the Bible only in worship haven't actually been hearing it all that often.

(This one may write itself, but if it doesn't, the *Century* can help. See (for instance) Greg Jones's [reading of this text in Wendell Berry](#), Gordon Marino's exploration of [Kierkegaard and enemy love](#), and Nicholas Wolterstorff's tough look at [love and forgiveness](#).)