

Acts 17:22-31  
Psalm 66:8-20  
1 Peter 3:13-22  
John 14:15-21

## Sermon May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2023

*As Jesus Lives, So Will We!*

As we read through the gospels, we see that Jesus genuinely loves the people in his community who are undervalued, rejected, outcasted, persecuted by their neighbours. By the religious authorities. By the soldiers, leaders, of the Empire.

Jesus expresses his love to these people not only with his words, but also with his actions. For example, Jesus welcomes the Gentiles, the tax collectors, the sinners, the differently abled, women, children, to eat and drink at his table. Jesus feeds them as they sit there hungry on the beaches in Galilee. Jesus invites them to sit beside him while he is teaching despite protest from others. Jesus listens to them when they are hurting. When they are sharing their theological thoughts at a well in the middle of a hot day. Jesus heals them when they are sick. Jesus reconciles them with their neighbours when they had been pushed out of their communities.

Jesus stands with the Gentiles, tax collectors, sinners, differently abled, women, children, and speaks out on their behalf. Challenging their neighbours. Challenging the authorities to treat them better.

Jesus genuinely loves the people in his community who have been undervalued, rejected, outcasted, persecuted (**Image One**: Someone offering support to someone who has been mistreated).

Unfortunately, Jesus' love for these people comes with a cost. The authorities don't like what Jesus is saying and doing, and so, do everything in their power to silence him. From trying to get him to say something inflammatory that will get the crowds angry at him. To arresting him in secret, and sentencing him to death on a cross.

Jesus' love for these people comes with a cost (**Image Two**: Jesus hanging from the cross). But this doesn't stop Jesus from speaking out on their behalf. This doesn't stop Jesus from inviting them to sit at his table. This doesn't stop Jesus from healing them. From feeding them. From reconciling them with their neighbours. From loving them.

In our gospel, Jesus invites us to love our neighbours as Jesus loves us. What this means is that Jesus invites us too, to love the people in our communities who are undervalued, rejected, outcasted, persecuted. Jesus invites us to love those people we label as sinner, as Gentile (different from us), as tax collector. Jesus invites us to love the differently abled, women, children, elders, people of color, indigenous people, people in the LGBTQ two spirited community, people from other faith traditions who often face persecution in our community, people who struggle with mental illness.

When we love the undervalued, rejected, outcasted, persecuted people in our community. We love Jesus (**Image One**).

Unfortunately, when we love the people Jesus loves, we too face a cost (**Image Two**). We too face push back from authorities, neighbours, who don't like what we are saying and doing to welcome these people. We too face persecution, rejection when we walk with these people. We too become outcasts in our community for speaking out on their behalf.

When I served in Radisson, we had an outgoing couple who helped us lead a youth group for a couple of years. We became really close. I even acted in a dinner theatre they were directing.

We were very close until I chose to stand up for, and speak out on behalf of a group of people who were being unfairly mistreated in the church. In the community. Then, because of where I stood on this issue, they shunned me. They stopped talking to me. When I would pass them on the street, they would turn their heads the other way.

We were really close until they didn't like what I was saying or doing to help people who I believed were being undervalued, rejected, outcasted, persecuted by our community.

When we love these people. When we love like Jesus loves, it comes with a cost (**Image Two**). But this treatment that I faced in my life, though it hurt a lot, didn't stop me from inviting the undervalued, rejected, outcasted, persecuted people to sit at my table. This didn't stop me from offering words of healing for them. This didn't stop me from feeding them. From reconciling them with their neighbours. From loving them.

When we love our undervalued, rejected, outcasted, persecuted neighbours we love Jesus (**Image One**).

Have you ever faced push back for standing up for someone who was being mistreated in your community? How did you feel? What did it take for you to keep speaking out? To keep walking with them? To keep inviting them to your table?

In our gospel, Jesus invites us to love the undervalued, rejected, outcasted, persecuted people in our community. And then goes on to reassure us that because Jesus lives, we will live also.

The resurrected Christ gives us hope that though there is a cost (**Image Two**) to loving the undervalued, rejected, outcasted, persecuted people in our community, we will bear witness to the new life that is possible when we keep loving them (**Image One**). We will bear witness to people who have felt undervalued all their lives, now feeling valued. We will bear witness to people who have felt rejected, outcasted, all their lives, now feeling welcomed, accepted for who they are. Empowered by this hospitality to extend this hospitality to others. We will bear witness to people who have felt persecuted and

afraid for most of their lives, now feeling safe and ready to reflect God's kingdom come in the world through their words and their deeds. Feeling free to proclaim what Jesus has done for them to set them free from the shame they have lived with for way too many years.

Yes. There is a cost to loving people that are being hurt and oppressed (**Image Two**). But God transforms our cost into new life where we see Jesus' love at work in the world changing the world into a place that reflects God's kingdom come. A place where people feel welcome, safe, forgiven, healed, redeemed, and empowered to love one another as they have been loved.

When we love the undervalued, rejected, outcasted, persecuted people in our community, we love Jesus (**Image One**).

Let us pray, loving God, help us love the undervalued, rejected, outcasted, persecuted people in our community. When we face pushback or persecution for loving these people give us the strength, the perseverance, the hope, to keep loving them. To keep inviting them to sit at our table. And reassure us as we continue your work in the world, that because you live, we will live also. **Amen.**

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