

Genesis 45:3-11, 15
Psalm 37:1-11, 39-40
1 Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-50
Luke 6:27-38

Sermon February 20th, 2022

Jesus Acts with Love and Grace to All

The gospel narrative we hear this morning is very relevant for us, as we see the impact that this pandemic has had on our relationships. Lately, I have noticed that people are finding it easier and easier to look across the room, and feel anger, frustration, fear, even hatred towards those who are dealing with this pandemic differently than them. Friendships have broken up. Family members are estranged from one another. Strangers are yelling at each other in the streets. Physical altercations between people have been increasing in frequency.

People are being labelled. Generalized into groups. Maskers versus anti maskers. The vaccinated versus the antivaxxer. Those who oppose restrictions versus those who support restrictions. And even though many of us fall somewhere in-between when dealing with these issues. It seems everyone of us is being placed in a group. And with this, we are finding it more and more difficult to talk to those from other groups.

Don't get me wrong. This tension between people from different social groupings has been going on for years. The pandemic didn't start the fire. In the words of Billy Joel, it has always been burning since the world has been turning (**Image**). Unfortunately, the pandemic has magnified this problem.

So, where do we go from here? Is it still possible for us to build bridges with one another? Or have we crossed over that line where there is no return to civility? What does Jesus mean when he says we are invited to love even our enemies? Even those we animatedly disagree with? What does this love look like?

These are questions we seriously need to ponder as we move forward as a community. How do we love one another in the midst of all this tension and anger we feel towards one another?

Because it is really hard to love someone who hates you, or someone you have come to hate. It is really hard to forgive someone who hurts you. It is really hard to not judge someone who you think is making choices that you believe are harmful or selfish or oppressive or impeding on your rights as an individual. It is hard to love those we see as our enemy.

One of the reasons for this is that when we feel hurt by someone we react. We retaliate. We talk at the person. We say hurtful things like name calling. We sometimes act out violently, because we feel threatened.

In our gospel, Jesus sees how the people he ministers to are dealing with the oppression they are facing. They want to react with violence. They want to retaliate. They want to give back to the Romans what they have received.

Jesus has seen the fate that comes to those who act with violence against the Empire. Unfortunately, Jesus will face the same fate even though his call to justice never became violent. Jesus wants better for his followers. Jesus wants better for us. Jesus wants better for our world.

The kingdom of God that Jesus reveals to us isn't like our world. It isn't a place where violence, retaliation, inhospitality, and hatred are accepted. The kingdom of God is a place where God's love overcomes these things. The kingdom of God is a place where peace, forgiveness, hospitality, and love reign. And Jesus wants his followers, us, to live out this kingdom in our world. To show even our enemies a love that doesn't lead to a cycle of violence and oppression between different groups of people. But a love that heals relationships. A love that creates a hospitable environment where we can build bridges to walk on together (**Image**).

This is the love Jesus shows us when we fall short. When we speak and act in ways that hurt God and one another. Jesus chooses to love us. Jesus chooses to forgive us. Jesus chooses not to judge us, but to show us compassion. Jesus cleanses us. Jesus heals us. Jesus builds a bridge for us to walk on. So, that we can follow him. So, we can live out this love in our world. Revealing God's kingdom come.

This is the love Jesus invites us to live out. Loving our neighbours. Loving our enemies.

Yes. Sometimes it isn't easy. Sometimes the people we are in conflict with are not willing to walk towards the bridge. Sometimes we struggle to get to the bridge.

Sometimes we do find ourselves in a situation where it isn't safe for us to move forward on a path towards reconciliation. Sometimes we find ourselves in an abusive relationship where we are getting hurt over and over again.

Sometimes this text is interpreted in ways that put people in unsafe situations. That is not what Jesus is telling us here. Yes. Jesus talks about turning the other cheek as a metaphor about being generous when someone in need asks for more than we are willing to give. But, Jesus is not telling us to stay in an abusive relationship and keep getting hurt.

Jesus is not condoning the violence of others or promoting injustice. People who are acting unjustly will face accountability for their actions. But, God balances this accountability with grace. God's main purpose is to give everyone an opportunity to heal. To be cleansed from the bad parts of themselves. To learn from their past unjust actions.

And as Jesus reiterates throughout his ministry. This accountability is in God's hands. Sometimes God uses us as instruments to help God in creating a just society. But, this accountability is in God's hands. And God invites us to trust that God will make everything right.

So, Jesus deters us from judging one another. And instead, challenges us to love even our enemies. Even those people who hurt us. But, in ways that are safe. For example, praying for those who hurt you (**Image**). Instead, of getting on Facebook and saying hurtful things in retaliation about the people who hurt you. Pray that God will change their hearts. Pray that God will get them the help they need. Prayer is a safe way that we can continue to love those who hurt us without putting ourselves in a situation where we keep getting hurt.

We can also forgive someone without having to continue in a relationship with them. I know. This is hard for many of us to hear. We often times see forgiveness and reconciliation as synonyms. But sometimes in abusive situations reconciliation isn't possible. Especially when the person who hurts us is unable to genuinely repent. But we can let go of the anger inside us, with the recognition that the relationship we have with this person isn't a safe one to be in. We can forgive and move on. Even get to the point where we wish them well. Where we hope that they experience healing.

Sometimes all we can do is pray. Forgive. And move on. Leave it in God's hands where it belongs. Then sometimes those who hurt us or those who disagree with us are willing to meet us, and talk. Sometimes there is hope that we will experience repentance and forgiveness that leads to reconciliation (**Image**). Sometimes we witness the transformative powers that God's love can have on people.

How do you feel when someone shows you love when you think you don't deserve it? For example, you are acting in a hurtful way towards someone and they respond to your action with love. They don't retaliate. They don't react with hurtful words or violent action. I have found myself in these situations before, and they really do make us think. What am I doing? What am I thinking? Being loved when we are doing something hurtful can have the greatest impact on changing us to be more loving towards others.

Jesus loves us in this way. Jesus loves us with grace. And Jesus is impartial with who he chooses to love. Even those people we feel anger and hatred towards right now. Jesus loves them. And this is hard for us to understand. But Jesus loves us all. And

what we hope is that by Jesus loving even our enemies that through this love, their hearts will change. Our hearts will change. And we will finally have the tools we need to build that bridge that brings us closer together.

Let us pray, gracious God, we give thanks for your Son who reveals your unconditional and transformative love to us. Whom loves us even when we struggle to love one another. Help us safely love those who hurt us. And give us the tools we need to build bridges of repentance, forgiveness, healing, and reconciliation with those we disagree with. **Amen.**

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