

Love your Enemies

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[0 : 00] I'd like to add my welcome to Naomi's. My name is Vijay. I'm one of the pastors here. That passage, it still hasn't changed in the last few seconds since Elaine read it to us.

It still says, love your enemies. And one of the reasons we do expository teaching here at Holy Trinity, that is we work all the way through passages as they come rather than pick and choose. One of the advantages of that is that we end up preaching a passage like this one, a really difficult one that if you were to ask me, would I choose to preach this? The answer is no, I wouldn't want to preach this passage.

Expository preaching is a protection device on the congregation. And so we're left with this really tricky passage. Like last week, it's easy to understand but really hard to do.

But did you notice that right before Jesus says, love your enemies, did you notice what he said first? Have a look down. He says to you who are listening. It's as though he sharpens his focus and prepares us for the tough thing that's about to follow because he knows how hard it is to love your enemy.

[1 : 11] For three weeks now, we've been thinking about discipleship. A disciple is one who listens to Jesus. And not so words go in and out and wash over us.

That's hearing, isn't it? And merely hearing will always be the temptation in a passage which says, love your enemies. Turn the other cheek.

Maybe as soon as you heard those words, they were in and out. They washed over you. You've put them in the too hard basket as though they're an optional extra just for the keen beans.

And so whatever comes next will just bounce off us. Jesus begins today by saying to you who are listening. Next week, he'll say, everyone who hears my words and puts them into practice is like a man who builds his house on the rock and not on the sand.

And so throughout this sermon today, as we hear Jesus' words, the question will be, are you listening? Because that's what disciples do when Jesus speaks.

[2 : 21] And so let me pray first. I know Naomi prayed, but let me pray again just to recognize that this is a really tough passage. Father God, please make us not just hearers, but listeners of your word, especially today.

Would your words not go in and out and wash over us, but deep into us so that we would actually dare to put them into practice. We need your help. In Jesus' name.

Amen. And so verse 27, look down at it. It says, love your enemies. And it's like a heading here for the whole passage. Jesus says, do good to those who hate you.

Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who mistreat you. And perhaps when we hear these words, our inner lawyer, that is, our inner lawyer who fights for our rights, our inner lawyer is protesting and thinks, well, it can't mean this and it can't mean that.

But notice how open-ended these commands are. So an enemy could be the neighbor who you're happy to have the really big fence with. It could be the colleague who's got it in for you.

[3 : 34] Even the church member who deliberately avoids you. An enemy here is the family member who you just don't speak to, maybe because of inheritance issues or a fight decades and decades ago.

And now you no longer speak. I reckon an enemy would even be a spouse. So maybe married, maybe together on the surface. But underneath, you see each other as enemies because of years and years of resentment and hurt.

This past week, a few politicians have been sick. Daniel Andrews, he was in intensive care. Just to prove that God does not show partiality. Greg Hunt, the federal health minister, he also copped it.

And maybe you see politicians left and right as your enemy. Maybe you interpret their sickness as an answer to your prayers. Maybe you prayed that God would finish them off this week.

That would be pretty drastic. But did you pray this week that Daniel Andrews would be well? That Greg Hunt would be well? Did you pray for their good?

[4 : 46] Pray for them to know Jesus, the ultimate good. Love your enemies. What does that mean? Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you.

Pray for those who mistreat you. Are you listening? And people might excuse themselves with these verses because love is so subjective.

What is love? What does it look like? Love, as Jesus describes it, it isn't doing good on the outside with resentment on the inside, you know, through gritted teeth.

It isn't loving someone just so they feel guilty and come back to you. Jesus' love is always 100% positive, always caring, always loving, especially to those we consider enemies.

It's not hard to understand, is it? Very hard to apply. And so baby steps are wise. A baby step for you, for us, me as well.

[5 : 47] A baby step would be just try not reacting as you normally would, just as a baby step. Just try not speaking or not acting the way you normally do.

Just do nothing as a first baby step when you're faced with an enemy. Just try that. Why not, if you're able to do that as a first step, the next step, why not try praying for them?

Maybe you won't have the emotional strength to pray for them out loud. Pray for them silently. You might need your family and friends to pray on your behalf, your Bible group.

That's where you should ask people to pray on your behalf for your enemy. All the time, asking the Holy Spirit for his help. Asking the Holy Spirit what the next baby step would be.

And then wait for his prompting. Along the way, our inner lawyer will be jumping up and down, objecting. They started it. The whole issue was their fault from the beginning.

[6 : 52] And if that's the case, then maybe you will have to be like Jesus to them in that situation. That is, that you'll have to make the awkward first move.

But our inner lawyer will object again. How far do you expect my client to go with this loving business? And I think the next few verses show us how far. Verse 29.

If someone slaps you on the cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. Give to everyone who asks you. And if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back.

Do to others as you would have them do to you. There's something unrealistic about these verses. I wonder if you noticed. Because no one who has ever been slapped on the cheek turns the other cheek for another helping.

No one who's had their coat stolen chases after the thief and says, Hey, you forgot my shirt as well. They are picture language for how far love should go.

[7 : 56] Do you notice in each example how costly love is? Insult me or slap me. I won't even defend myself. I won't even take my stuff.

I won't even demand it back. Love might cost us our dignity or our money or our right to be right. Jesus says, sacrifice them.

Love doesn't stop at an inch, but goes the extra mile. And if you're like me, you're already running through the ways and the people upon this will apply itself in your life.

Our minds are quite legalistic. Mine is anyway. I think deep down there's probably a Pharisee in there thinking about the terms and conditions and the legal limits of this love. Love and the caveats I can put in place to stop me.

And so the guiding principle of love is verse 31. Have a look. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. I added the unto bits.

[8 : 58] It doesn't actually say unto there. It's because this verse is so famous. It burned into my mind from when I was a kid. Even non-Christians can quote this verse back to you. Do unto others. And it's sometimes called by people the golden rule.

You see, back in Bible times, the golden rule was do to others as they do to you. Eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth. That is justice, isn't it? And I reckon that that is the golden rule out there as well. Treat people how they treat you. That's how things work in Australia. But Jesus turns all that on its head. He says, do to others as you would have them do to you.

So think of the enemy who gossips behind your back. How would you want to be treated if you were the one caught out doing the gossiping? Would you want forgiveness to be treated graciously? A bit of mercy, please. Do to others as you would have them do to you. Are you listening? And of course, this doesn't forego justice.

[10:08] It doesn't forego principles of equity. It just looks for justice at another time in Jesus on that last day. So here is a radical example.

I know a lady who, in my extended, extended family, and she looked after her elderly parents and they came to live with them in the years when they were too old to care for themselves. And she looked after them all the way until they passed away. When the estate was being divided, other siblings from interstate flew in and pounced on the good jewellery and the good furniture and all that sort of business.

And I reckon by rights, this lady, because of her care for her parents over years and years, I reckon she should have had first say in the jewellery and the good furniture and all that sort of stuff.

At least she should have had a say in, you know, a voice at the table. But her brothers, who sort of steamrolled the whole process, just took whatever and headed back interstate.

[11:11] And when she was asked, she said, for the sake of family peace, for the sake of love, I just thought it's not worth it and I'll let them have it. Isn't that a radical example?

Here is an everyday example. A member of our 1030 congregation who's in the room has a colleague who doesn't like him at all. That could be a lot of you. Every day, this colleague makes this Christian's life, you know, really tough at work.

One day they had a fight because the colleague was being difficult and unreasonable again. But the next day, instead of going in and treating people as he was treated, standing up for his rights, all that sort of business, he said, I'm going to walk up and be really friendly and really kind to this person, this colleague.

And he said the colleague was so taken back by how friendly he was that they didn't know what to do. And it changed their relationship. You see, a love of one's enemies is not common, but there are many common ways to demonstrate it.

See, it's easy to think of radical what-if scenarios that might occur once in a generation, but there are many common everyday opportunities to love like this.

[12:29] It is distinct. It will be noticed in a city like ours that has a lesser standard of love. Verse 32. If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you?

Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you?

Even sinners lend to sinners expecting to be repaid in full. You see, loving likable people is easy. Doing good to good people is a piece of cake.

You don't need a sermon about that. It displays nothing, however. It doesn't show a graciousness to anyone. Jesus asks, what credit is that to you?

It's just standard behavior, isn't it? He says, even sinners do that. The idea in these verses is about being distinct. And so let me ask you, in what ways are Christians distinct in our culture?

[13:36] What is the difference between a Christian and a moral middle class Australian? I wonder what you think the difference is. Is it love? Is it doing good? No, is the answer.

There are plenty of loving, good atheists out there. The moral middle class person, he loves other people. But the difference is how far they're willing to go.

You see, the moral middle class person, he loves, but only if someone's loving in return. Because that's as far as his inner lawyer lets him. That is the limit of the golden rule out there.

But the Christian listens to Jesus. Do good to those as if you were the one caught out doing bad. Lend your money to those as if you were the one with bad credit and needed a handout.

He says, love your enemies as if you were the enemy. And that will be costly. But you have another life to live. You see, the non-Christian won't go to this extent because they've only got one life to live.

[14:46] And so anything costly is a bridge too far. But the Christian has another life. You can give this life in costly love of others, money, dignity, your rights, because you have your real life in Jesus starting when you die.

That is the difference. It's not just love. It's the extent of love. That is the difference between Christians and moral middle class Australians.

It will stand us out in a culture like ours. And again, baby steps are wise. Just begin by responding how you normally wouldn't.

Just do nothing to start with as a baby step before you try big moves like doing good and debt forgiveness and all that sort of stuff. But so far today, all I've done is give you commands.

Do this. Do that. Don't do this. Don't do that. What is the logic that will enable you to love like Jesus? What is the motivation that will enable something so difficult to happen?

[15:53] And the answer is verse 35. Love your enemies. Love your enemies. Do good to them and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. You see, the idea in our passage today is which would you rather.

We had one of those last week. Today is another. Which would you rather be like every other sinner in Australia or a child of the most high God? Which would you rather?

Because behind all these difficult verses, I wonder if you saw God's fingerprints. Did you notice God's character behind all these verses?

Compassionate and gracious. Slow to anger. Abounding in love. That's what we heard in that Exodus passage. Behind these verses today, we can hear our own testimony of how we were saved.

Romans 5, it says, While we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his son. You see, at Easter, Easter's approaching.

[17:09] At Easter, that's where Jesus did verse 27. That's where Jesus loved his enemies. It's where he did good to those who hated him. The cross is where he blessed those who cursed him.

Where he prayed for those who mistreated him. Father, forgive them for they know not what they do. For us to do the same is more than just obeying commands.

It is to bear the family resemblance. You see, you will be children of the Most High. He is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just like your dad.

You see, in your family, maybe everyone has the same eyes. Maybe that's how I know that you're a Smith or a Jones. Maybe it's your personality that marks you out.

Or your blonde hair that says you're a Mason. Or one of those things. For Christians, it's a love of our enemies that bears the family resemblance.

[18:11] And so imagine a Christian. She's in a workplace. A modern Melbourne workplace. She's teased and insulted by her colleagues. Because she doesn't want to backstab the boss with the rest of the colleagues.

And so she's now become the butt of the jokes. Her work life is pretty agonizing. Trudging into work, knowing she'll get that reception.

And it would be great if her colleagues all resigned one by one. But obviously that's never going to happen. And so instead, she prays for her colleagues. She prays for their work performance.

She prays for them to know Jesus. And yeah, she's got her dad's nose and her mother's eyes. But the resemblance to God, the family resemblance, is undeniable.

Every time we're faced with the decision to love our enemies, rather than approach it as a command to do, change how you think about it. Think of it as an opportunity to be like our Father.

[19:13] Think of it as another way that we will be looking just like the Son, our big brother Jesus. Last week the passage was change how you think about suffering.

Today, change how you think about enemies. Think back to the cross. Think back to how we were treated when we were God's enemies. The graciousness, mercy and forgiveness we were shown.

And go and do likewise for your enemy. Rather than seeing tense situations, aggressive circumstances, think of it as an opportunity to walk like a child of the Most High.

It will be hard to love at these times, but your family resemblance to God will be undeniable. And so this stuff is really hard. It's something we all need to pray for.

And so I'm going to leave it there. There's a question time next week. And so do go away and think about your questions and come back next week. For now, I'm going to read verse 35 again.

[20:16] Then your reward will be great and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

And so let's pray that we would do this. Father God, please help us to be like you, to be like Jesus when it comes to our enemies.

Please, would we love them, especially the ones that have really hurt us. Please give us a soft heart. Please help us to think back to the way you loved us.
While we were your enemies, you sent your son. How costly. Please help us to take a baby step, one and then another and then another.
Help us not to try and shoot the lights out in the first try, but just a baby step. Please change how we think about enemies. Change how we think about aggressive situations.
[21 : 26] We need your help in Jesus' name. Amen.