

Message by Jermaine Yan for 20 January 2022 Unlimited Love

Today's Gospel continues Luke's version of the Sermon on the Mount, with teachings requiring unconditional, unlimited love and the prohibition of retaliation. The love that discipleship in the kingdom of God requires, that is consistent in the behaviour of Jesus' earthly pilgrimage, extends to all persons, regardless of merit or deservedness. The love of the disciple, like the love of God, goes out even to the enemy: those who do us wrong, those who curse us, and those who do damage.

This unlimited love does not come from a moral "should" but from an infused vision, a holy, enlightened view of all people that only God can give. Thus, it goes beyond mere daily justice, the norm that says that if you harm a neighbour, you are to compensate him or her on an equal basis. This love is to be expressed even when there is no loving response!

Jesus is not simply suggesting an ethical system, but rather a way of being in the world which reflects the ways that God is in the world. The words in which we find the summation of Jesus' direction, "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (v. 36), hearken and draw us to the bedrock conviction of Scripture that humanity is created to reflect the image of God within creation. Put another way, we are to be as God wills to be in the world. More importantly, we are to be this way because it bears witness to the truth of God's inclinations and desires within the act of creation, in the face of the world's logic that knows only power and retribution.

It is my sense that there is no greater witness to the truth of the Living God's will and desire for creation than for the oppressed to claim their identity as bearers of the image of God—to be in the world in ways that expose lies in the logic of iniquitous power and retribution. On the Christian account of things, it is precisely the reality of resurrection and the guarantee of God's final vindication of the bearers of the image of God that empowers the oppressed, and their allies, to be in the world in ways that continually give witness to this epiphany.

"Love your enemies and do good to those who hate you." Can you and I come close to fulfilling this expectation? If we want it to be more than just a well-known teaching, then we

must ask God to help us with its precepts, to take some steps in its direction. We do this by asking: who are my present enemies? We can begin this process by praying for them. It's hard to hate anyone for whom we pray. Secondly, we might probe why they are enemies: threat, jealousy, abuse, insecurity, violence, cultural or political differences, crime? Thirdly we can consider what steps we can take to bridge the gap: what is realistic, what is doable, what is within my time and resource limits?

We spread love, we live out love throughout our lives, as God is love. We may all have our enemies, it is even hard for us not to think about them, as well as not to retaliate them. How can we love them? It sounds impossible for us. However, we are all the same in God's eyes, we are all God's children. Even our enemies are created by God. As a result, we need to love our neighbours as well as our enemies. Just like parents always love their children.

Jesus teaches us "Do to others as you would have them do to you." This is the golden rule. Jesus talks about loving our enemies and doing good to those who hate us, curse us, and even strike us on the cheek. In other words, our response to others is not predicated on their behaviour. Our response, in fact, is diametrically opposed to the way others treat us. Jesus' response is to do good to those who do bad to us.

As co-workers in Christ's mission, we are called to imitate Jesus' radical, all-encompassing love. We don't always succeed. All of us fall short. But when we take some steps, we are on our way to coming very close to the very heart of God. It is true that we can hardly love our enemies, as we cannot fully ignore the pain which is caused by our enemies. Our God can comfort us. We can have strength from His love to face this pain. We have to pray, let God cure us in time, let God's love to strengthen us to overcome the pain, until the day we are able to love our enemies.