

## **All you need is love? Matthew 5: 38-48 Feb 19<sup>th</sup> 2017**

When Meg asked me to take this service, together we looked up the lectionary scripture reading for today. The request came just days after the tragic shooting in a Quebec Mosque, certainly I must have something to say about what it means to love our enemies.

My wheels turned and turned, but nothing felt right. In many churches this passage would have people talk about learning to love others who look or love differently from them. I saw this video the other day made by the organization Love Has No Labels – the kiss cam at the Pro-bowl, and it was ground breaking, getting lots of reaction. And obviously I love to see that. But that doesn't feel exceptional inside these walls. I see this kind of love present here all the time, I see it present in our welcome statement, and I see it present in our announcements and the tremendous response to the tri-language signs.

I thought we needed a bigger challenge than that. We need to think really deeply about what it means to love our enemies. The people that are holding the world back from peace and justice. In a time when people are seeking asylum and turned away, when immigrants are scared of deportation, where black people are regularly shot by the police, where Muslims are shot while they pray? What does it mean to talk about loving our enemies? And is that a worthwhile solution? Is loving enough?

I want to start answering that question by telling you about my experience at the Worshiplude service two weeks ago. Early in the service we paid our respects to

the victims in Quebec and the organizers decided we were going to reach out to the local mosque and send them a video. The band played a rendition of the Beatles All you need is love, and people waived heart flags we picked up on the way in. It was clear most were of a generation not to really know the tune of the song, and as we hummed along a little off key, I was cynical. I looked at my buddy Gord and wondered if this wasn't a little tokenistic? All you need is love....and respect, and equal rights, I whispered in his ear, feeling like this song over simplified things just a little bit.

Then our moderator, the Right Rev, Jordan Cantwell got up to deliver the sermon. She spoke dynamically and told a story of a United Church in Fisher River, a northern First Nation community where the traditional people had a very contentious relationship with the church. She talked about an Indigenous man, Frank, who HATED the church, deep in his being. He hated them for the generations of condemnation of his culture, for saying that his traditional spirituality was against God, and that the drum had no place in church. And I'm sure no one here would tell Frank that those feelings of hate weren't justified. But Frank decided he didn't want to be a person filled with hate, he decided he needed to find a way to resolve his feelings. So he started going to church, and got to know the people he hated. Now he is the chair of their property committee and in Fisher River the drum is finding a place in worship. He was willing to step out of his comfort zone, and show love to his enemy by learning about them and seeing them as multifaceted humans, rather than just as oppressors. What a great example to follow.

Well that's great, but it begs the question: where are the limits, with loving your enemy? When it means praying for someone who cut you off in traffic, even though it was dangerous, because you don't know why they were in such a rush so you take time to empathize. I can do that. Loving someone that hurt you and trying to understand what is happening in their life that made them act that way, knowing that hurt people hurt people. I can get behind that. But what about abusers, people lacking empathy, who refuse to ever admit they might be wrong? Are we wasting our energy loving our enemy on someone like Donald Trump?

I saw a post online (and of course I couldn't find it again for the slide) that said "I'm not going to waste my time praying for evil" because there are all these others people who are suffering, and marginalized who I will be praying for instead". Is that the right approach?..... I say it's not. Because once you start drawing some lines about who is deserving of your love, it gets easier to draw more and more lines.

Jesus was radical about who he showed love toward, the least and the lost. Tax collectors, swindlers, mentally and physically sick people, prostitutes. Everyone that may have been deemed evil in his society. But here is the great thing about it. Jesus loved those people, he welcomed them, he dined with them, he prayed for them. But that doesn't mean he didn't hold them accountable. Love and forgiveness are not mutually exclusive with accountability.

The thing about evil, is that it doesn't work alone. People are very rarely evil, they may do evil things. But if we discounted loving or praying for everyone who did an

evil thing, we would be doing those marginalized and suffering people a disservice. Evil doesn't succeed in our society because of one person, no matter how high up the chain they are. It takes people along the way who agree and support, but even the people who do nothing, who choose to be bystanders, to allow evil to happen.

So yes, even in world full of other suffering people who need your prayers, actions and love; take time to also love your enemies. Hear them, be compassionate, but lead by example, and hold them accountable. This is an important way for us to support those who are vulnerable and victimized in our society, while avoiding creating more divisions and enemies.

So that brings us back to the big question, is love all you need? Is loving people enough? When I think all that loving others truly means, going beyond Valentine's day flowers and chocolates, I think those first two things I whispered to God, fundamental rights, and respect, are already covered. I think loving means being open-minded, non-judgemental, listening to hear instead of listening to respond. Loving means standing up for those who are struggling, love means working deep in the trenches for justice. Loving means holding people accountable without accusing, and it means being compassionate even when it's hard. I think that love means believing that actions are evil but people are not evil, and they are always worth loving. If love is all these things, and we follow Jesus' call to love our neighbours, love people who are different from us, and even love our enemies; then even if love isn't ALL we need, it is an essential first step in the right direction.