

## Are you still listening?

A Message shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church  
February 20, 2022  
by Rev. Dave Le Grand

That is a challenging one, isn't it? Don't do unto others, expecting reciprocation. We may remember the powerful songs of praise earlier in Luke, Mary and Zechariah both proclaim how merciful God is. Jesus teaches that we are to forgive enemies, to give mercy as God has always been merciful. <sup>1</sup>

Has there ever been a time in our lives when we were kind to a person who did not return that kindness? Have we ever muttered a curse under our breath When a friend asked you to pay her back? How unGRATEFUL! Be honest now.

Well, Jesus has gathered the disciples, apostles, and a mass congregation for this sermon on a Plain. The Plain in Luke is a metaphor for the level playing field that Jesus creates as he preaches: *Be merciful, because God is merciful.*

Remember how Jesus made his hometown crowd angry? Having seen Nazareth in his rear-view mirror, power is flowing from him, according to the storyteller Luke, everywhere; he is healing and casting out spirits, extravagantly, unconditionally, for anyone and everyone! He is modelling that mercy he preaches about; walking the talk.

I'm wondering if more than a few listeners had had enough at this point in the sermon on that Plain. I'm wondering if some just got frustrated and walked away. Those of you who hear, listen! Are you listening?

I was not a very engaged elementary school student. When the teacher was teaching something new, I was terrified that she or he would ask me a question. I'm still anxious in some settings where I'm learning something new, wondering if I will understand. If I understand something, then I'm engaged. If something is new to me, I might not hear it as easily.

I wonder if there was anyone there for the sermon on the Plain not making sense of what Jesus was saying. Sure, Jesus had the young Ruler sum it up later in Luke:

“Love God with all your heart and soul and mind,  
And love your neighbour as yourself.” <sup>2</sup>

But some of those listeners that day, were they hearing?

- Love your enemies...
- Do good to those who hate you...
- Bless those who curse you...
- Pray for those who abuse you...
- If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also;  
and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt...
- Give to everyone who begs from you. <sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Working Preacher found at <https://www.workingpreacher.org/> Sarah Henrich Commentary on the Gospel February 20, 2022

<sup>2</sup> Luke chapter 10

<sup>3</sup> Luke chapter 6, verses 27 – 30 New Revised Standard Version New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Who is *still* listening?

If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you?

For even sinners love those who love them. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great.<sup>4</sup>

What does loving our neighbours mean, in practical terms? Jesus is getting very specific about this, no wiggle room left for those listeners, or us. Loving means unconditionally loving, even that neighbour who hates us – we love them.

The person who wants to harm us. Now I don't think Jesus is suggesting that we put ourselves in harm's way, but we *still must love* that person. We can pray for them, and, if their partner dies, we might take a casserole over.

Think about the most curmudgeonly, bitter, resentful neighbour you can imagine – that person is a child of God. Love them. Pray for them, and an opportunity to understand them better.

I often turn to Anne Lamott for good theology, and a chuckle. Think back to 2003, the President was George W. Bush, and he and the Republicans were on a rampage after the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks in the United States. (Did I tell you that Lamott hated George W. and Republicans?) She does, however, love her church community and her pastor both of whom she credits for saving her life.

Back in 2003 she offered this perspective in an article, perhaps a modern take on what those first listeners felt as they listened to Jesus preaching on the Plain. She wrote:

...change is not my strong suit. Neither is forgiveness, or letting go. Everything I've ever let go of has claw marks on it...

Everything was so sweet at church, the singing, the kindness, the plain old grief, and then the pastor had to go and ruin it all by giving the sermon -- on loving our enemies...

Then the pastor said the most stunning thing I've ever heard her say: "When someone is acting [sic] ugly, God loves them just the same as God loves the innocent. They are still just as loved by God." I was shocked... I thought she was talking about the White House, but then she kept on preaching, about Jesus, and Dr. King, and -- if you read between the lines -- the people in my church. All of us -- and there are some exquisitely good people in this church. It was outrageous. She said you don't have to support people's political agenda, but you did have to love them, if you want to follow Jesus.

She said you could tell if people were following Jesus, instead of following the people who follow Jesus, because they are feeding the poor, sharing their wealth, and making sure everyone has medical insurance. Then I zoned out.<sup>5</sup>

As we continue to dive deeper into what it means to love our neighbour, it means to love absolutely everyone. It means being merciful to everyone just as our God has been merciful before, is merciful to us now, and just as God will always be merciful. Who do you and I need to love today? My hunch is that it will not take us too long. Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid verse 32

<sup>5</sup> Salon magazine. Published September 26, 2003. [https://www.salon.com/2003/09/26/loving\\_bush/](https://www.salon.com/2003/09/26/loving_bush/)  
Page 2 Are you still Listening? Based on Luke 6: 27-38 7<sup>th</sup> after Epiphany Feb 20, 2022