

## ***Peacemaking Perspective***

A Message shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church

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by Rev. Dave Le Grand

Jesus talks about his love for his friends, there have been Bible scholars who have asked: *What about enemies? Does the Love that Jesus speaks of extend to those who want him dead?*<sup>1</sup>

That seems to me a very pressing question when we consider the polarizing climate of politics that often encroaches upon our family conversations. What about the “enemies”, Jesus? It might be too glib to quickly respond to that question with: Of course, Jesus loved his enemies too!

“How” can we abide in that Divine Love as Jesus teaches, when, daily we cope with a constant of modern life being people around us who are certain that they are right and others wrong – like, for example, those people who routinely accuse health authorities of denying them their personal freedom, to cite only one example. Of course, there are many more examples of self-righteous people on all sides of the ideological and political spectrum. How do we cope also with regular news about tyrants in our world, you know those people commonly referred to as evil – Putin, Jong Un, Xi Jinping? How do we remain in God's love?

Into this storm of our debates over rightness and wrongness, I hear the words of Paul speaking from the first century: Rejoice, and again I say rejoice. Paul speaks of God's peace as beyond human understanding. This is the same Paul, the guy who in modern terms might have been called evil because of his persecution and murder of followers of Jesus. Now, as he writes the letters in our Bibles, he's converted and incarcerated, soon to be executed for his belief in Christ's Love. Here, from the jail cell, Paul proclaims Joy and Peace.

Our modern context is not so different from Paul's and Jesus' times. Consider the ancient context: egomaniacal political leaders; a large population of vulnerable people with few human rights; a time when the rule of law and economics, favoured those in power. Does that sound familiar? Yet Paul, the tyrant-turned-felon and follower of Jesus, is relentless in his message that God's peace needs to be our focus, rather than the politics and in-fighting that his churches often indulge in.

And Jesus, talking about Love. First the love of God, Jesus called him Father, God's love for him. Jesus describes his deep love in turn for his friends: There is no greater demonstration of love than to give up one's life for one's friends.

Every Remembrance Day I pay particular attention to the elderly, frail, veterans who soldier through the cold damp November 11<sup>th</sup> Remembrance ceremonies, as we all hear the timeless words:

At the going down of the sun and in the morning  
**We will remember them.**

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<sup>1</sup> Susan Hedahl, Commentary on John 15: 9-17. May 17, 2009. <https://www.workingpreacher.org>

In spite of our petty arguments here in Canada, it is difficult for us to imagine the horrors of war. My privilege is confronted in this season when I hear stories told of “Great Wars,” or younger veterans share something of their experiences of the modern face of war – child combatants, improvised explosives, and large populations of refugees forced out of their homes.

What does Jesus, and Paul, have to say to our modern reality of polarized debates on TV and in our homes, the name calling, and the reality of wars in our world that seem to make little sense?

I’d like to share a folk tale from Tanzania:

Once upon a time there was a village in Tanzania where many different animals – such as the elephant, giraffe, antelope, lion, tortoise among others – lived there. The giraffe was their king.<sup>2</sup>

One day there was a shortage of water in the village. There were no natural springs and not enough rain. This was a big problem. King Giraffe called a meeting of all animals in the village to discuss how to solve the problem of water. They all agreed to dig a well which, they believed, would provide enough water for all. But Mr. Hare was against the idea. He didn't want to dig.

Almost all of the animals gathered together and dug the well. Mr. Hare did not help; instead he laughed at the animals as they were digging.

Within a short time, the animals had good, clean water. King Giraffe, however, prohibited Mr. Hare from using the well water.

Since Mr. Hare could not get water, he decided to trick the animals. He went to the elephant who was on duty to guard the well and said, "I have some honey, which is very sweet. Would you like to taste it?" The elephant tried some and, liking it very much, asked for more. Mr. Hare said, "I will give you more honey, but first I have to tie your hands and legs. You will enjoy it even more this way." Mr. Hare then tied up the elephant and jumped into the well. He drank some water, swam, and ran away laughing.

King Giraffe was very angry to hear that Mr. Hare had tricked the elephant. The next day, King Giraffe made the antelope the well guard, but Mr. Hare tricked him, too. The king tried each of the animals in the village, and the hare tricked each and every one of them. The king was furious.

Finally, it was tortoise's duty to guard the well. He sat inside the water waiting for Mr. Hare to come. The Hare eventually came and proudly jumped into the well thinking that there was no guard at all. But the tortoise caught him and took him to the king, who punished Mr. Hare severely. Ever since then, the animals have lived in peace, enjoying their clean, fresh well water.

What do you think about that ending - was it satisfactory to your thinking? The folk tale speaks to the challenge of living in community, and the problem when not all in the community temper their own needs with the needs of the community.

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<sup>2</sup> I found this folk tale on the “Peace Corps” website: <https://www.peacecorps.gov/educators/resources/hare-and-water/#:~:text=Once%20upon%20a,fresh%20well%20water>.

To bring back the message of Jesus about Love, our Gospel today presents an enormous dilemma to those of us who really despise Mr. Hare in that story. *Does God's Love embrace the "Mr. Hares" of our world too?*

To say "yes", of course, God loves the Hare, the tyrant, is not to say that there shouldn't be consequences. God bless the peacekeepers in our world – military personnel who risk their lives to create safe space for the most vulnerable. I am grateful also for the humanitarian workers who let go of comfort and safety to help in the most horrific situations.

God's Vision of Peace, as Paul says, which is beyond our human understanding, stretches way out to include the criminal, the narcissistic political leader, the self-absorbed activist, and you and me, as it certainly embraces our veterans who have faced conflict, suffered, and struggle with the memories. God loves us. Christ loves us. At the end of the day, we collectively need to lean into Love when we are tempted to indulge in polarizing argument, or name calling, or gossip.

It starts as simply as that. Peace begins with each of us, trying to remember to lean into Love, abiding in, living in that Love, and speaking love when everyone around us seems to antagonize. Leaning into God's Love – perhaps *that* is how we might begin the work of Peacemaking. Amen.