

How can we be good neighbours?

Proverbs 3:27-32 + 1 John 3:11-24

Is anyone one here being challenged by the teaching in the last few weeks? I know I have. I mean we may know the theory – we know the Gospel – our desire is to follow Jesus in all aspects of our lives. But knowing and doing are 2 different things aren't they?

In the past weeks we have considered who is our neighbour and why we should be good to them but Today we are going to look 'How we can be good neighbours?

Jesus loved us so much that he laid down His life for us and in the 1 John reading we heard that because He did this for us , 'we ought to lay down our lives for others – wow that's a mighty request/command isn't it? But before we get that far let us step back a little – we are **first required to love our neighbours**.

It seems obvious and that it is the right Christian thing to do. But we live in the real world, where resentments, anger, grudges, violence, dominate. Just look around you - daily we hear stories of people not being loved - killed, raped, divorced, bullied, sued, terrorized, abused, victims of road rage and it can happen to anyone, whether you are at home, office, school, Christian or not. Things are not all rosy within churches either, if you read the pages of the Bible, you'll find what happens in the real world also happens in the lives of Christians. People are not getting along with each other. People are living with hatred, which the Bible equates as murder in their hearts. If we cannot love our Christian family how can we begin to love our non-Christian neighbours?

If only people could learn to love one another – just as we instructed to do in the Bible”!

But even in the best of circumstances loving isn't easy. What about our very difficult neighbour who just won't clear up the garden or leaves rubbish everywhere? What about the tramp who is just always drunk and noisy? What about that single mum who seems to have a number of gentlemen callers? Or what about the really cantankerous old person up the road?

In our reading today we hear that true love is this -- that he- Jesus- laid down his life for us. He loved us so much that he took upon himself the sin of the world. And he took it to the cross where it was crucified and wiped out. And

our slates were wiped clean. Because love found its way to a cross. God loved the world so much that he gave his only son so that all who believe in him (that is, acknowledge and accept with their lives what he did for them) should not die but have everlasting life.

And John says -- This is the kind of love that ought to characterize our lives as followers of Jesus. We ought to be doing the same thing, if we are a true follower.

For true love manifests itself in sacrificial action. And we ought to lay down our lives for one another.

So practically speaking, what exactly does this mean for us?

You know, when we think about sacrificial love we remember stories of soldiers who went above and beyond in the World wars and even in present day conflicts-- risking their lives for others. We also think of people who rush into burning cars or buildings to save people.

These acts, and similar acts, demand great deals of courage. Many of these people put themselves in harm's way in order to do what is right.

Consider Martin Luther King- One of the finest orators and civil rights leaders of the 20th century did much to change the United States' policy on racial discrimination.

After helping to launch the Civil Rights Movement by heading the 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott, King founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, a black religious organization that directed nonviolent protests against racial discrimination.

The zenith of Dr. King's career came on August 28, 1963 with his "I Have A Dream" speech, given at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. He spoke to 300,000 people and millions of television viewers, rallying for a world free of prejudice in which people would not be "judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character."

For his part in advocating racial harmony and equality through nonviolent means, King became the youngest ever recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964.

Although an assassin lamentably cut his momentous career short in 1968, Martin Luther King, Jr. and his words continue to inspire the oppressed everywhere

And what about Rosa Parks' with her 'Sit Down for Civil Rights'

Rosa Parks refused to sit at the back of the bus where the black people were designated to sit. What she did launched the Civil Rights Movement. When asked why she did it and whether it was because she was tired, she replied'

"No" she said, "the only tired I was, was tired of giving in."

Although instrumental to the Civil Rights movement, Parks went on to live in anonymity after the protests, working as a seamstress for almost a decade and not receiving national recognition until later in life.

You can all think of other countless examples where people have displayed courage and love for others, but, you know, the sacrifices that most of us are called to do in Christ's name are not going to be headline making. They're not going to be dramatic. They're not even going to be recognized by most people.

To the contrary they will be routine, often trying, occasionally boring, and relatively uneventful.

But that's all right. We're not trying impress anyone or get anyone's attention. We're just trying to grow the kingdom of God in the place where God has planted us. We're just trying to manifest love in sacrificial action.

And it doesn't matter if anyone else really notices because with each and every action the kingdom of God is brought closer to fulfilment.

So some practical thoughts to help us be good neighbours: Teresa of Avila said this:

Christ has no body on earth but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which Christ's compassion for the world is to look out; yours are the feet with which He is to go about doing good; and yours are the hands with which He is to bless us now."

I. Use our eyes

The Proverbs reading tells us not to Withhold good from them to whom it is

due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it. We need to see with Jesus' eyes – with compassion and see the need of people near and far.

2. Use our hands- We lay down our lives and love by using our HANDS -- extended hands and giving hands. By helping to do the shopping or the garden for a sick neighbour

3. Use Our Feet:

And we lay down our lives is with our FEET -- when we go the extra mile -- the above and beyond the call of duty mile. I.e. putting others needs first even when it may be inconvenient to us

And when we see and do what Jesus wants us to do we must also remember that we are to **Act now** - . In the proverbs verse we are told that we must not delay:

Say not unto thy neighbour, Go, and come again, and tomorrow I will give; when thou hast it by thee

4. Use our ears:

We are laying down our lives and loving our neighbours when we take the time and energy to lend an ear.

You see, being a good listener isn't natural for most of us. We'd rather hear ourselves talk. At least I would. But listening to each other is one of the most important things we need. We all, at times, just need someone to talk with.

5. Use our Mouths:

there are times when we have to risk our reputations and our positions and our comfort levels to speak up on behalf of our neighbours. But we do so because we love them and we want them to be treated fairly.

When you are offended, hurt, in pain, frustrated or angry, you have the greatest opportunity to be a witness of Jesus Christ." By speaking forgiveness and blessing – we are showing how much we love and care for them.

The difference Jesus should make in your life should be how you treat strangers, people who are different and people who you don't know very well.

I sometimes overlook the opportunities for smaller acts of service...acts that become holy when done from a place of love and grace and gratitude. Life is messy. People are complicated. Getting our hands dirty; literally or figuratively, requires a willingness to get involved in the middle of the mess and complications. Yet, that is exactly what Jesus has called us to do. -

Finally, if we are to truly become Jesus' hands and feet, we must **share His love for "the least of these."** This is the hard part of the gospel message for us sometimes. Jesus was revolutionary in His approach to the downtrodden and forgotten in His society. He touched lepers, He welcomed women and children, He dined with criminals, He championed the poor, He defended the powerless. Jesus spent His time on earth with the hated and the outcasts and claimed that He had come to "preach good news to the poor."

There was a little girl who had a very large collection of dolls heaped on her bed. A guest in her room one day asked her "Do you love dolls" Then, with tender loving care, she spread out the whole collection for the guest to inspect and admire. The guest asked her, "Which doll do you love the most?"

- She hesitated, then said, "Promise not to laugh if I tell you." He promised. She picked a ragged doll with a broken nose whose hair had mostly come off, and one arm and leg were missing. "This is the one."

"Why?" the visitor asked.

"Because if I didn't love this one, nobody else would."

So how can we be good neighbours? It comes down to LOVE, LOVE . LOVE

Love here means allowing for growth through failure, looking towards future potential. Love means not expecting that other people will get it, the first time. Or second time or third time. Love means forgiving the baby steps people take when they get it wrong. Love means knowing in the heart people are worth it,

Love means seeing others through Jesus's eyes.

God does not call all of us to sell everything we have and give it all to the poor, but He does call us to get involved and allow Him to show us how. If I want to be the hands and feet of Jesus, I have to open my eyes to the suffering in the world and allow my heart to be broken by those things that break the heart of the Father. Because there is so much brokenness in our world, I can become overwhelmed by the need and throw my hands up in despair. But we each can make a difference and it matters that we try...God is at work in the world and we can be part of it. We can be the hands and feet of Jesus in our part of the world...what a privilege!

Prayer:

Lord, let your love fill our hearts and minds, that we may love the world with the great love that you have for the world; that we may love you with all our heart and mind and strength, and our neighbour as ourselves.