

# Love your Enemies: 23-Feb-25

Last week we journeyed with Jesus guiding us on blessings and woes. This week follows straight after giving us strength and fortitude to do what we need to do. The teaching that Jesus is giving us in today's message is very challenging and counter-cultural to our human reactions which at first glance are ingrained into us. Jesus constantly has on offer an invitation to go against that; to transform our lives and others to do likewise. Once more we are being enlightened by the very essence of love, mercy, and generosity, urging us to embrace a deeper and more meaningful relationship with one another – and any stranger who may come into our lives, walk into the church, or even a casual acquaintance. The call to love, especially our enemies, is a bold invitation that requires an immense amount of courage, commitment and faith the Holy Spirit is your guide.

At the heart of Jesus message is the absolute transformative power of love. Jesus doesn't just suggest loving those who love us; he commands us to extend that love to all, including those who may wish us harm. This can be both a liberating and daunting prospect. The brave challenge lies in our ability to look past the barriers of resentment, fear, difference and division. What Jesus is asking us to do isn't natural and sometimes it definitely isn't convenient; it requires us to become the vulnerable one, as put aside our defenses and embrace those who challenge us the most.

I'd like to focus on the phrase, 'do good to those who hate you.' It asks us to step firmly into the challenge of active love – a love that seeks the well-being of not only friends and family but also strangers and adversaries. This love moves beyond sentimentality and passive feeling which involves shallow and meaningless words. It's witnessed in the way we treat others, how we communicate with people in our community and each other and importantly how we work our way through conflicts. All things which our role model Jesus has given us the necessary skills to achieve. When we apply these four things in our lives, we become contributors in the creation of a society founded in understanding and compassion rather than retaliation and anger.

The act of blessing those who make our lives difficult or seek to cause us harm in one way or another, or praying for those who mistreat us is an exercise in humility and grace. It invites us to see them in a different light. Rather than see them as 'enemies' see them as those who deserve a prayer for God's grace and to be redeemed of their ill will, hatred and to be filled with a Christ-like love and humility in much the same as we already experience. If we can make the shift in perspective it can go a long way in altering our interactions and relationships with others. By embracing the challenges of love, we become change agents, who are actively participating in a cycle of grace rather than perpetuating the cycles of hurt, pain, violence and war as we witness every day in the world we live in.

What stands out to me in this reading is Jesus' directive to give without expecting anything in return, serves as a powerful reminder about the nature of generosity. Now isn't that counter-cultural in a culture which often operates with the understandings of 'scratch my back and I'll scratch yours', and 'it isn't what you know, it's who you know'. Each one of those holds within it expectations of a return favour. In our congregation we are trying to achieve something to support the congregation's future, as we take missional steps to form a greater connection into the community; it's going to be a tough ask, and the fruitful outcome may take some time to be realised, but we will be relying upon your faithful generosity to see it as part of the life and witness

of Christ's generosity already given to us over the 153 years of St Ninian's existence. In a world often fraught with transactional relationships, where reciprocity dominates our relational interactions, Jesus' call to give freely transcends conditions and any expectations put upon us by society. This kind of generosity demonstrates our capacity to be empathetic in seeing the needs of others. When we give out of abundance and radical kindness, we're not only uplifting others but we're also involved in cultivating a spirit of gratitude and joy within our spiritual lives and the wider community who are still getting to know who we are and what Christ means to us.

Jesus is emphatic about the importance of not judging others, a reminder that our perspectives are narrow and often flawed. This injunction requires us to continue to nurture a spirit of openness and acceptance. When we stop the habit of judgment, a crevasse opens wide allowing for the spiritual space of growth and a more concrete relationship with Christ as well a more promising relationship with those who are being judged. This doesn't mean excusing harmful behaviour but rather understanding and confronting issues while maintaining an attitude of love and compassion in the same way Jesus did. When we are brave enough to do this, we're growing an environment where healing can occur in all manner of relationships we have with others including ourselves.

What is often missed out in the process of being the judge over others is that our attitudes and actions are often a self-reflection rightly or wrongly of ourselves, our values and beliefs. 'For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you' serves as a caution and an encouragement; how we treat others will eventually come full circle back to us. This thought is echoed throughout much of life and serves to remind us that we are part of something far greater than ourselves – the body of Christ where we rely on each part to the benefit of the whole not the individual. Our individual actions amplify into a collective response that shapes our world.

When we're actively engaging with Jesus' call to live our lives absorbed in a Christ like generous love and compassion, we're less likely to be involved in individualism and judgement. The challenge of standing firm in these truths inspires us to be active participants in the creation of a more beautiful and harmonious world rather than passively watching from the sideline, commenting on what 'should be done by someone else'. In a world ravaged by division and animosity, rising to Christ's invitation of radical love and unparalleled generosity is both a courageous choice and an almost heroic act of hopeful faith. By remembering and acting upon these truths, we not only honour the teachings of Jesus but also remind others of the beauty that can be cultivated through love in its purest form.

Amen