

Love Your Neighbour as Yourself

Sermon - Sept 6, 2020

Scripture Reading: 2 Corinthians 9:1-11 and Romans 13:8-14

Golden verse: "Love your neighbour as yourself." (Romans 13:9)

A week ago, we were debating how we can learn to love those people who are quite difficult, harsh, and impatient with us.

Today, based on our Scripture reading, we are focusing on the Great Commandment. We will try to find out how we can love our neighbours, not only with words but practically with actions. I highlight this again: with actions.

We have to avoid the temptation to think that our neighborly love should be just a feeling from us. There might be people thinking that neighbourly love is nothing more than simply a feeling of warmth or attachment to someone, or recall that person's face with kindness.

Our heavenly Father is reminding us that our neighbourly love has to be expressed in recognizable actions.

I cannot talk in detail in 20 minutes about all those actions the Bible is teaching us to do for our neighbours, but I categorize God's teaching in three different groups. And for this, I borrow Paul's teaching to his young disciple Timothy. In 1 Timothy 4:12, the Apostle Paul encouraged the young Timothy to be an example for everyone in this world. This morning, our Lord turns to us with the same expectation: *"Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, and in purity."*

Let's love our neighbours with words, with our behaviour and conduct, and let us love them with actions.

1) In Matthew 12: 35-37, Jesus said: *"A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words, you will be condemned."*

In Colossians 4:6, Paul says: *"Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone."*

When we are talking about a conversation, or communication, the Greek word GRACE can be translated as polite, enjoyable, pleasurable. At the same time, Paul says that when we talk to each other, from our heart and our words, the GRACE of God should shine. Through my words, people should notice that I personally have already experienced the GRACE of God, because I am not judging anybody, but accept everybody as they are.

These days, we live in a very disturbed and chaotic world. Because of this situation around Covid-19, we all are more sensitive and most people are experiencing high anxiety. The divorce rate was never so high as these days. Given the current condition, we could all use a little extra sunshine, grace, and laughter. We need not only more front line workers, but more kindness in

general. In our communication, we have to reduce the overall burden rather than adding to it. Dear beloved, let us communicate with kindness.

Don't Broadcast

Those who are experts in listening and communication noticed that these days we do not communicate with gentleness and kindness, but we practice so-called “personal broadcasting.” We are not having conversations and we are not listening to each other but we are broadcasting our opinions, like the TV or radio broadcasters on social media. For this, the other person, to whom we talk, is not engaged in a communication. Furthermore, today millions and millions of people post their thoughts or ideas on social media and it doesn't really matter to them who is listening to them or who read what they wrote. They don't really care if anybody is listening to them, but they have this urge to “broadcast” their opinion about anything. When we just “broadcast” to our spouse, our children, or our friends what our opinions are about certain issues, we don't give them a chance to reply. For this, we are removing the interactions between them and us.

A kind communicator is not a personal broadcaster. So before we might jump to broadcast our own experiences, feelings, or thoughts, we should get curious about other people, to whom we are talking. After we share with each other a fact, or news, or our thoughts, we always should do this with kindness, gentleness, and love. We should ask the other person to share with us their opinion about the information we shared with them.

If you would like to be loved more, in a communication ask your partner to tell you MORE about his or her thoughts and feelings. When we dig into another person's thoughts and feelings, we communicate concern for them. This will help us to establish a stronger connection.

2) We have to express our love towards our neighbours with our behaviour of friendly kindness. That means we should not pretend to be who we are not. If we truly care for others in our hearts and love them, our behaviour and communication should reflect kindness and practice empathy.

Were you ever thinking about the difference between empathy and sympathy? It is very important to understand the difference between empathy and sympathy and their outcomes.

So, what is empathy and why is that very different than sympathy? Empathy fuels connection. Sympathy drives disconnection.

Theresa Wiseman came up with Four Attributes of Empathy:

- To be able to see the world as others see it – this requires putting our stuff aside to see the situation through the eyes of a loved one.
- To be nonjudgmental – judgment of another person's situation discounts the experience.
- It is very important to understand another person's feelings – we need to be in touch with our personal feelings in order to understand someone else's. It means we have to ask ourselves: how would I feel in that situation? This also requires putting aside “us” to focus on our loved one.
- To recognize other people's emotions and communicate that. We should communicate that we understand the other person's feelings – rather than saying, “At

least..." or "It could be worse..." try, "I've been there, and that really hurts," or "It sounds like you are in a hard place now. Tell me more about it."

Empathy is FEELING with people. Empathy is a choice, and "it's a vulnerable choice".

Let's say that somebody fell in a deep dark hole. The person is shouting from the bottom: "I am here down. I am stuck. I am scared. It is dark here. I am overwhelmed." We look at this person from above, then we say: "Hey, I will come down where you are and I want to share with you that situation. I want to know how it looks from there and I want to embrace you to feel that you are not alone."

Sympathy is like, when a third person is looking down to these two people, who fell into a deep dark hole, saying: "Uh, that's a bad situation where you are, I know. If you want to eat something, I can drop you a sandwich, but you have to catch it."

If we want to be empathetic, we have to go down with the other person into his or her situation to have the same feeling.

In a similar conversation, those sentences which start with "At least ..." are not sympathetic at all. And we should recognize how often we say that, just because we are not empathetic but may be sympathetic.

When somebody wants to share something with us, which for him is extremely painful, we should not minimize their problem saying: "at least".

Sometimes when we communicate, we try to make things better, and we use sentences, which start with "at least..." and we don't realize that we are not empathetic at all.

Let me give you a few examples.

- My girlfriend had a miscarriage. - At least you know she can get pregnant.
- I think my marriage is falling apart. - At least you have a marriage.
- My son is getting kicked out of school. - At least your daughter is a great student.

We have to learn, that if somebody will share something with us that is very difficult for them, our best empathetic answer would be: "I don't know what to say right now, but I am so glad you told me."

The truth is that we rarely can give a response which would make things better. What makes something better is CONNECTION.

Empathy is feeling WITH people. It's not feeling for them or at them. It is feeling WITH them. Even if we don't understand or agree with their response, we can empathize with them. In doing so, we communicate with kindness. And the ability to see and feel something from another person's perspective is one of the most powerful skills we can learn today.

We have an empathetic Saviour, who came down from heaven into this world, to see and feel how we live and struggle day by day. He was not judgmental. He did not turn His back to some people, just because their way of thinking was different than His. He did not judge anybody and in His words, He was never hurting people. He never destroyed anybody's self-esteem, just because the other person was different. But He loved everybody with unconditional love.

We should talk in a way that people would enjoy the way we talk through the tone of our words and sentences. We all know people whose tongue is very sharp and we try to stay away from them. Let us talk as Jesus would talk today through us.

And if we will talk and act like Jesus Christ, we will be loved by our neighbours.

About Samuel, we read: *“And the boy Samuel continued to grow in kindness and in favour with the Lord and with people.”* (1 Samuel 2:26) If we want to be loved, we have to show kindness, love, and empathy.

3) Thirdly, we have to continue to help people in their needs. We have to learn to understand not only what they say but also what their needs are.

Just a few practical words of advice:

- We should collect money and donate.

At this point, I would like to say many thanks for those who helped our brothers and sisters in Cuba in this difficult pandemic, when their whole country is destroyed. People are not visiting their resorts and they have absolutely no income from anything. Thank you that YOU were thinking of them with your donations. I would like to say a VERY SPECIAL THANK YOU to a couple, who recently donated \$500 to our brothers and sisters in Cuba. We should remind ourselves what the Bible says that *“God loves a cheerful giver.”* (2 Corinthians 9:7)

Let's recall again those verses: *“Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. As it is written: “They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures forever. Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us, your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.”* (2 Corinthians 9:6-11)

- Be someone's hero for the day. Call somebody at a nursing home, talk to the elderly, and put a smile on their faces. Sharing time to interact with people will give you a feeling you will never forget.
- When we will go back to the normal, hopefully, we will have the opportunity again to donate our time to help make or supply meals working at Ray of Home soup kitchen for the needy.
- Make things. If you're good at making things, give your time to create useful items. This might be clothing, blankets, hats, food, etc. Do whatever it is that you are good at and help out.
- Paul is encouraging us, that we should *“encourage one another daily, as long as it is called “Today,” so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.”* (Hebrews 3:13) This would show that we feel responsible for our neighbours' spiritual well-being.

Dear beloved, let us love and serve each other with words and actions, inviting people to God, who is able to fulfill all our needs, as Paul is encouraging us: *“Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever*

you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” (Colossians 3:16-17)

Let it be. Amen.