

Date: November 2, 2025 (All Saints Day)

1. Texts: Daniel 7:1-3, 25-28; Ps. 149; Ephesians 1:11-23; Luke 6:20-31.
2. Subject: Christian faith in action.
3. Topic: resist evil with active love.
4. Aim: challenge.
5. Proposition: "Justice and love require our advocacy, proclamation and action."

## JUSTICE IN LOVE, LOVING JUSTLY

That reading from Luke is a little scary.

But I say to you who are listening: Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you; bless those who curse you; pray for those who mistreat 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 asks of you, and if anyone takes away what is yours, do not ask for it back again. Do to others as you would have them do to you.<sup>1</sup>

Does this mean that we have to pray for people who persecute us? Are we supposed to just accept people who shoot at us with rubber bullets? Are your grandchildren supposed to tolerate the bullies who push them around? This passage is difficult—especially because it came from the man who would be the first and chief martyr of the Christian faith. We have to figure this out, just as we had to figure out how we are to hate our family if we are to love Jesus.<sup>2</sup>

First of all, rather than speaking to just the apostles, Jesus was speaking to all who were receptive to his message. Ultimately, that means that Jesus was speaking to us, as he has spoken to uncounted generations of Christians throughout the past 2,000 years. We can't avoid this passage.

Then Jesus used a series of commands to give directives to his followers. These are not polite suggestions. These are not a list of options from which a believer might choose. These are marching orders for those who follow Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 6:27-31.

<sup>2</sup> Luke 14:26.

So, “*love* your enemies”, “*do good* to those who hate you”, “*bless* those who curse you” and “*pray* for those who mistreat you.” With phrases such as these, Jesus turned our sense of justice and love upside down.

We want to respond to our enemies with righteous anger. We would rather punish those who hate us. We usually curse those who curse us. And, if we were to pray for those who mistreat us, it would likely be prayers asking God to punish them. Jesus has turned our natural retaliation and retribution into living and loving justly.

So, Jesus actually did mean what he said.

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 asks of you, and if anyone takes away what is yours, do not ask for it back again.

Jesus is demanding from us self-sacrificing love. The same quality of love that Jesus would later demonstrate on the cross of Calvary is the same love we are to show to others.

I can't say how far Jesus would push this concept of self-sacrificing love for us. This next bit is uncomfortable.

If we were being persecuted because we were Christians, then the example of Jesus and the apostles would lead us toward martyrdom. We should fight for the truth of the gospel and the reality of Jesus even to the point of death. It is unlikely that any of us would face this trial, but Jesus would say the salvation of others is worth our deaths.

But what if we were being bullied because someone had the power to bully us? What if someone were hassling us just because our skin is the wrong colour or our country of origin is different than theirs? What if someone breaks into our homes and steals our tv and laptop? Are we just supposed to take that?

Yes, said Jesus, but this is not blanket acceptance of evil and injustice. We don't respond as the perpetrators of evil have done. If we respond as they have acted, then we would respond with equal violence, with retribution and punishment. Jesus' disciples are to respond with non-violent resistance and with public dishonour of the oppressors. That is, we proclaim to the world that injustice has been perpetrated. We declare the evil of their actions. We make clear the selfishness and disrespect of those who persecute others.

And, we continue this public resistance until the perpetrators have acted in public repentance.

We can word it in another way.

But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ...<sup>3</sup>

That is, when someone perpetrates violence or oppression against us, we speak the truth in love about them and to them. We declare publicly that such acts of violence, oppression and persecution are unjust and contrary to our creation in the image of God. We speak the truth in love and keep speaking it long after the heat of the moment has passed.

Because all this is the command of Christ to his followers, it is applicable to us when we are the victims of evil. Things change drastically when we observe injustice happening to others.

Christians are challenged to actively intervene when someone else is being attacked and persecuted. Jesus calls upon us to defend the widow and orphan, to do good for those who are being oppressed. Our level of defense must rise to the level of the perpetrator's attacks. Thus, involvement in wars must be justified by Christ's commands to love one's neighbour as oneself.

Throughout this all, the Christian is to powerfully seek justice, peace, righteousness and reconciliation. Jesus put it this way:

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<sup>3</sup> Ephesians 4:15.

You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.

You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.<sup>4</sup>

We are to preserve God's world as he created and intended it to be. We are to be God's light in the face of evil's darkness. We are to do things to bring about God's kingdom of justice and truth. We effectively defend those who are being persecuted and we advocate for justice and truth. We publicly confront injustices perpetrated upon others. We work for transformation of the systems which allow injustice to flourish. This is how we will love our enemies and do good to those who hate others.

It is immediately clear how this message of active and just love in the face of oppression is as applicable in our time as it was in Jesus' time. Love without justice is mere sentimentality. Justice without love inclines towards punishment. The Christian Church throughout the world has the mandate to speak out in love and justice in the face of persecution and oppression, especially the persecution and oppression of minorities, exiles, immigrants and the marginalized. The advocacy and proclamation of loving justice must be made in Ukraine, Palestine, eastern Africa and the United States. The followers of Jesus, who listen to his commands, are obligated to such advocacy and proclamation.

It is more difficult to apply these ideas to our more immediate surroundings and personal relationships. We often can't quite see the persecution and oppression in our own towns and in our own relationships. It's there, I'm sure. If you ask the Muslim asylum seeker or publicly LGBTQ activist, you'll hear about it. The First Nations citizens in our communities are frequent victims of systemic injustice. But, close up, injustice is harder to recognize when at home.

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew 5:13-16.

The fact that we can't easily recognize it, does not relieve us of the obligation to love and to living justly. The commands of Jesus compel us to view ourselves, our town, our province and our nation with the eyes of loving justice. It's harder, I know, but following Jesus obligates us to being more aware and to taking more action.

There are days when I might wish that following Jesus were a little easier with fewer consequences. But we're celebrating All Saints Day today, and so the Scriptures challenge us to look at the breadth of being a disciple. We are being stretched do as the prophet Micah wrote,

He has told you, O mortal, what is good;  
and what does the LORD require of you  
but to do justice, and to love kindness,  
and to walk humbly with your God?<sup>5</sup>

This is what Christians do, with their eyes focussed on the poor and oppressed, on the persecuted and ignored. We hear the commands of our Lord and take action. We do so, even at the cost of our own comfort and perhaps even at the cost of our own lives.

AMEN.

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<sup>5</sup> Micah 6:8.