



LESSONS IN LIVING

Loving Through Difficult Times

“Part 3: Love is Kind”

A St. Andrew's Sermon
Delivered by Dr. Jim Rigby
August 23, 2026

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (*The Inclusive Bible*)

Love is patient; love is kind. Love is not jealous, it does not put on airs, and it is not snobbish; it is never rude or self-seeking; it is not prone to anger, nor does it brood over injuries. Love doesn't rejoice in what is wrong, but rejoices in the truth. There is no limit to love's forbearance, to its trust, its hope, its power to endure.

Sermon

Thank you for being here. Thanks for making time for us.

These are interesting times, and, I'm hoping the current series is going to be helpful in terms of how to remain human at a time like this. So much cruelty, so much ignorance.

I think it's really helpful to remember that many of the texts, both Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, that inspire us were born out of times like this. I mean, when you actually read the text, Herod is as much a part of the story as you know who is in our day.

But there's a side of this kind of bravado that has always been a mystery to me, particularly here in Texas where there seems to be this belief that being macho and being ignorant somehow fit together. That's never made a lot of sense to me. There's a whiskey out now called Liberal Tears. *[Laughter]* So those of you who are MAGA can enjoy that. But think how unhappy somebody would have to be to find that funny. Think how miserable and wounded you would have to be to think that ridicule is humor. There's also a gun oil named Liberal Tears. And they have a bacon aroma to one of the— if I understood it right.

What's fascinating, as you know, one of our members is running for Senate. And it's made it interesting for us because they've tried to smear us as a way of getting at him. And you realize that while Jesus taught to love our enemies, there seems to be a relish in finding enemies and hating them. And one of the clearest signs of false Christianity is hating people who are different.

I mean, again, I've always felt that Jesus should have some say in what Christianity is. Just a little footnote there.

That idea that you're not a real Texan if you're vegan. It's okay to be a felon, that's fine.

[Laughter] That's just strange to me, that you're more of a Texan if your knuckles are dragging the ground. And what's hard is not to sink to that level in response. If we do, all is lost. To realize that the struggle, real struggle, is not to save Texas or to save the United States, but to save our own humanity. To not lose that in this struggle, because that's what has happened to roughly a third of this nation. That they've checked out of the most decent part of themselves.

They've rejected the core elements of America. “*E pluribus unum*” is rejected as DEI now. The idea that every human being has a right to life, liberty, pursuit of happiness is rejected as communism now. So, it's false Christianity, but it's also false patriotism. And the problem is we can catch it very easily and sink to the same level and think that showing pictures of Donald Trump overweight are somehow funny.

Christianity was born out of a time very similar to this. And the focus of the religion was love, not the Apostles' Creed, not any of the dogma or the moralism, but love, compassion. So, we're walking through Paul's love passage one word at a time. Thank you for your patience. Because I think unpacking these words will help us understand what Paul meant when he said the word ‘love.’ If we thought love was just a feeling, we would be in very bad shape at a time like this, because sometimes you cannot feel it, that you can't muster it. But what Paul is saying is that love is a balance of the great virtues. And the virtues aren't just rules. They're the components that make us fully human.

So, we're going to walk through and see a different word today than what we've seen so far. Let's look at this word, the word “Chrestos”.

Chrestos (χρηστός)

It's one of the most beautiful words from the early church. What's interesting, it means kindness. But also mellowing. And in the early text, you sometimes see people switching the word Christ and *Chrestos*. So, the idea of Jesus being the Messiah was no more central than the idea of compassion.

We're going to look now at some of the ways that this word has been used in Scripture. It'll help understand more deeply what this word means. The English word ‘kind’ doesn't do it justice. This is from Matthew. (Jim reads from the scripture)

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy... (Matthew 11:28-30)

- is the way you usually see it translated, but the word is *Chrestos*. In this culture, if a farmer cared about a particular beast, they would take a plane and customize it for the animal so it wouldn't chafe. The word for that was "*Chrestos*".

So, one of the ideas of kindness is a religion has to adapt to the person, not vice versa. When Jesus said the Sabbath is made for humans, not humans for the Sabbath, he's saying "don't go crazy." Don't have religion replace compassion because there's nothing more common. The cruelty, the things that people are afraid of and upset about.

I have no idea what policies some of these politicians are running on. All I know is they hate their opponent, and they're protecting us from Muslims, from Bigfoot, from the UFOs. The real problems in our everyday life. I saw on the web one person wrote this: "Sorry, but if we let people choose their own gender, then what's next? Something else that's none of my business and won't harm me in the slightest? I mean, where does it end?" *[Laughter]* Obviously, the policy we're talking about is plutocracy, where you destroy the middle class and the rich people split the money. And nobody's going to vote for that. So, we're being distracted by all these side issues that have nothing to do with our lives.

The yoke was what united the animals in a common enterprise. The word is related to the word for yoga. I think one of the poverties of traditional Christianity is it has a very small palette of what it considers to be your practice, your personal practice. What we learn from the true teachers of yoga is that anything can be your yoga—gardening, cooking, anything that takes you to your own depths and helps you feel your interconnectedness with other beings. To think of love as a practice takes a whole lot of weight off of it. And it's something that we have to return to. We can't do it all the time. Whatever helps you feel your roots in the universe and your ties to the web of life is your yoga.

And one of the essential tenets of any compassionate teaching is for some people, sometimes you have to start with yourself. If you don't like yourself, it's going to be very hard to love other people. If you're carrying wounds that you haven't given yourself permission to feel and to heal, then it's going to be very hard. Because you can't work around emotions. You have to go through them and absorb them and transform them. And that's what a lot of this idea of *chrestos* is. But the first thing to realize is you have to do it your way. You have to trust that calling you feel inside. If you try to do it somebody else's way, it's probably going to short-circuit for you.

And the second thing, the second way it comes across is it doesn't turn on and off depending on what somebody else does. (Jim reads from the scripture)

Love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you'll be children of God, because the Most High is kind," which is *Chrestos*, "*to the ungrateful and wicked.* (Luke 6:35-36)

Another image that Jesus uses is of the sun. And again, he's speaking idealistically here. If somebody's trying to take all of your money, you're not going to help them by giving it. If somebody's abusing you, you're not going to help anybody by being their victim. But in your

inner sanctum, can you realize that your greatest joy is when you're shining this compassion, this love?

Have you ever been in love with somebody and you just felt bliss? And then some creep comes along and wants to ruin it, and you won't go there, because you don't want to lose the joy. You don't want to lose the high. I think that's what Paul is trying to remind us.

When you're happy, you naturally feel kindness. When you're feeling bitterness, resentment, you're probably not as happy as you should be or could be. It's the human condition. It's not that we don't fall into that. But to emanate this awareness, this compassion, and do not let other people's foolishness rob you of your own wisdom. What good is wisdom if it can get turned off by the first creep that walks in the room.

When I was a kid, I used to love watching fireflies. They're sort of a metaphor for me in a lot of ways. When Jesus says, you're the light of the world— first of all, they're not always on. They're not always glowing. You can't love all the time. You can't feel it all the time. But if you can realize that's the core of your being, that's when you're going to feel most alive. Then you just kind of shut down when it's not there for you. You don't have to hate. You don't have to react. But then when the light starts coming back, and again, to give yourself to that. And to realize that that is your gift to give the world.

I was very lucky in high school to run across a Catholic monk named Thomas Merton— not in person, but in book form. He said this, and I wish there was some way to teach this to the leaders of the state of Texas: (Jim unfolds a text and reads from it)

It is easier to serve the hate gods, because they thrive on the worship of collective fanaticism. To serve the hate gods, one has only to be deceived by collective passion. To serve the God of love, one must be free. One must face the terrible responsibility of the decision to love in spite of all unworthiness, whether in oneself or in one nature.

So, we do it because that's where our joy is. Think if you knew that light was available to you regardless of what other people do. It would be so much more consistent. The joy would be so much more consistent.

Now here's the last thing. (Jim reads the scripture from the screen, commenting at length in the middle of the text)

And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. ", except for leaders of Texas. Otherwise the new wine will burst the skins; the wine will run out This is saying adapt to the times, right? It's saying if Galileo looks and says the Earth is not the center, it's okay, let it go. If Darwin realizes that you don't have to have the Genesis story to understand humankind, it's okay. The wineskin can fit— the wine can fit a new wineskin. In fact, it needs to. *and the wineskins will be ruined. No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins. And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for they say, 'The old is better' (Chrestos). (Luke 5:37-39)*

The idea here is that wine can be bitter when it's new. It mellows and is sweet. People can be like that, too. If you've ever known an elderly person who just glowed, and they reminded you almost

of like a newborn, that kind of light that kind of shines out. That's somebody who has mellowed as a human being.

Lincoln, I don't think, would be very happy with his party. I don't think any decent human being would be happy with what has happened. I think the MAGA movement is more of an insult to Republicans than it is to anybody. And the mystery to me is I understand why they hate us, but why do they not even protect each other from this bully? That's the part that doesn't make sense to me. This is Abraham Lincoln.

The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, we must think anew and act anew. We must disenthrall ourselves”, which is very interesting wording.

“We must disenthrall ourselves, and then we shall save our country.

The only thing I have left to share with you is the Buddhist version of what Paul is saying. It's called the *Metta Sutra*. In Buddhism, they have a wonderful practice of trying to make things as short as possible. Like sutra and sutures. Those words are kind of related. So, Buddha was very compassionate to shorten things. Metta means 'kindness.'

Metta Sutra

*Whatever living beings there may be;
whether they are weak or strong, omitting none,
The great or the mighty, the medium, short, or small,
The seen or the unseen,
Those living near and far away,
Those born and to-be-born-
May all beings be at ease!”*

There's a bodhisattva vow you hear of in the East where a Buddha refuses to be enlightened until all other beings can be enlightened.

Could we see the second part of this?

*Let none deceive another,
Or despise any being in any state.
Let none through anger or ill-will
Wish harm upon another.
Even as a mother protects with her life
Her child, her only child,
So with a boundless heart
Should one cherish all living beings;
Radiating kindness over the entire world:
Spreading upward to the skies
And downward to the depths.*

Again, if you've ever fallen deeply in love, it's not just that one person. Animals sound different. Insects sound different. The stars pop out. That's a small taste of your great self. The sages

through the ages have said we are part of a larger life. And as scary as it is to let go of the smallness and the fear and the anger and the bitterness, that's where your joy lives. So, realize that love is not just a feeling, it's also a practice, which means you can get it wrong, too. That's okay. You return to the path. Then to realize that it doesn't have to be something that turns on and off depending on what somebody else does. You love because that's where your joy is. And then finally, you don't let the foolishness of others rob you of the bliss of living a life of love.

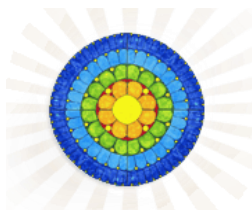
Well, that's the best I can do with our passage this week. We'll take a moment for you to think about how you understand these words.

Benediction

Rev. Carol Johnson

Beloved, tend to your hearts. May you manifest love in the fullness of your being. May you radiate kindness over the entire world. May you see yourself and each person through the lens of love. Abide in joy. Go in peace. Amen.

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