



LESSONS IN LIVING

Loving Through Difficult Times

“Part 6: Love is Not Rude”

A St. Andrew's Sermon
Delivered by Dr. Jim Rigby
September 13, 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. I appreciate y'all. How many of y'all had to cross the picket line when you first got here? (laughter) So some of y'all saw. Yeah, when I was in seminary, they didn't really explain this part of it. So we've had protesters. One thing that's new is that we've had spies with hidden cameras. So if somebody tries to trick you into saying something that can be edited into something cruel, just be very careful. But as long as they do it in Christian love, I think we shouldn't question. (laughter)

So seminary didn't prepare me for it, but the Sermon on the Mount certainly did. I mean, the Sermon on the Mount says that if you love the way I love some of the people that are going to be the cruelest to you will be family members and churches. When you look at the story of the New Testament, the cruelest, meanest people were regarding religion over and against what Jesus had to teach.

So Jesus believed there's a love that transforms the world, and it's a whole different kind of love. I mean, you see it in other cultures too, but when you see the word 'Christ,' that's not Jesus's last name, and it's not just the Greek version of the word Messiah. It was a new idea of humankind where every person counts, that in Christ there's neither male nor female, Jew nor Greek, slave nor free. That means that your essential humanity is not weighed by your human condition. You're not limited by your gender. You're not limited by your economic status. You're not even limited by your religion. *Neither male nor female, Jew nor Greek, slave nor free.*

But that profound humanity is something that makes people very uncomfortable. And sometimes the people who teach religion are the most terrified of it. I don't think the congregation will be in danger from these people. I think it's the clergy, and I'm hoping it'll be Babs. (laughter) Unselfishly (laughter). But they kind of think of you as sheep. They have no idea. They have no idea.

That idea of shepherd-sheep is a really immature version of what Jesus was talking about, that this is a place where we can come – it's true, when we're not all there, we're afraid, we're wounded— this should be an eye of the storm. But it should bring about justice, fairness, so that people realize that rising to advocacy for other people is a part of the calling, as a part of love, that justice and love are not separable ideas.

I will never forget the Sunday after church where we had a bomb threat. And what made it really horrible is we didn't see it till after the service. So if they're really going to blow something up—but it was because I had pro-choice ideas. And they were willing to threaten a church and a preschool. And that was a very long night because I realized that if I'm going to be a friend to women who need reproductive care or to LGBTQ people who simply need to live their lives, that that's going to put me in trouble with a lot of the traditions of the Church. I prepared myself to risk my life, but you can't risk other people's lives.

So this week when we found out that spies were infiltrating, taking videos and editing them to make us look bad, That was a sense of violation. But I also thought that is what Jesus has warned us about. That as long as the Church doesn't love anybody who's different, as long as the Church doesn't stand up for anybody, then you're safe. But if you stand up for Muslim people, Jewish people. You stand up for people of color who are having their voting rights stolen. You stand up for women whose personhood has been erased in this culture. And you realize as passionate as these guys are that nobody should touch their gun, that they're apathetic to women having the same rights over their own body.

We reached an endpoint this week when Trump gave the Pledge of Allegiance to himself. I don't know if anybody missed that, but a Pledge of Allegiance to the President of the United States. Now let's think about that for just a second. Originally, this nation had a Constitution, and people pledged allegiance to the Constitution itself. Then a very clever plutocrat said, “*Well, let's replace the Constitution with the flag, and people pledge allegiance to the flag. We can twist that very easily.*” But this is a step beyond that where you're not even pledging to the flag, you're pledging to the person who waves the flag regardless of the cause, regardless of the crimes that are being excused.

When I graduated from seminary, and came to this church. Admittedly, it was a mistake. (laughter) Because we both started getting in trouble. But I realized with every cell in my body that the world does not need another traditional church. What the world needs are churches who lay themselves on the line for the gospel. For human rights. For the inclusion of all persons.

So we're going to look at the Love Passage. But the question is, how do you love in times of hate? How does the church become an eye of the storm? Where people aren't stepping out of this

trouble, the struggles, but they're coming here to remember what Love means and that even our enemies are human beings. That's our question today.

Original Word: ἀσχημονέω

Transliteration: aschémoneó

Pronunciation: ah-skay-mon-eh'-o

Now, the word that we're looking at today is hard to translate: *aschēmoneō* (ἀσχημονέω). Whenever you see an *a* in a Greek word like this at the beginning, it usually means it's the opposite. So 'agnostic' is the opposite of 'Gnostic.' 'Atheist' is the opposite of 'theist.'

The Greek for the schema, it's the plan. It's, what something is like from the outside in. My guess is what Paul is saying— it's usually translated as “*Don't act in an unbecoming way,*” but that's useless, right? Because if you knew what's unbecoming, you wouldn't need the rule.

And one of the worst things that can happen to Christians, including our friends outside, is that when they look at the Bible, they consider themselves standing next to Jesus all the time, and the people they hate are the villains of the story. Instead of saying, “*Man, we're all bozos on this bus, right? We're all trying to figure which way is out.*” But if you think you are born good because you're an American, if you think you're born good because you're a Christian, and your notion of good and evil is based on a melodrama that you're playing out in your head, then you are ethically neutered. You don't know what ethics are.

The question is, what are the principles, what are the values, what are the virtues that would be good if all of us did them? I think Paul is saying do not become cruel for kindness. Do not become unloving to bring about love.

And again, when you look at the campaign in Texas coming from Christian sources, you know there's a cancer in the theology itself. I mean, I kind of want to be a Christian. That's my job. But when you read Church history, you know there is a huge problem in the architecture itself. Because these are not stupid people. They're not necessarily mean people. But they do stupid things, and they do very mean things and cruel things. Because the theology itself numbs them with fear. If you believe in hell, fear will crowd out your wisdom. Think about that. If your religion is based on escaping a torturer God, you can't really love that God. You can fear that God. But only the call to love is an escape from fear.

What I realized after years of ministry— I went through seminary, no sense of my own privilege, I thought I was not political. Lots of ministers, particularly us white males, don't realize that we defend the status quo as apolitical, and yet there's nothing more political than the status quo.

It may not show up to me because I'm in the system. The system works for me. But what I didn't realize was the price tag that other people were paying for my comfort. The women whose voices were erased so that I wouldn't get my feelings hurt. The people of color who were not

included in the historical record so I could feel comfortable. These are assaults on the body of Christ itself.

Paul said, that in the body of Christ, there's neither male nor female, Jew nor Greek, slave nor free. Now, what that tells you is Christ is not just Jesus's last name. It's like our version of enlightenment where you experience humanity, and I think the web of life as our larger life, our larger self. But to do that, you have to stop looking at people as though they were their schema. That males do this, females do that. In Christ, that doesn't happen. Judaism is this, Christianity is that. In the body of Christ, that no longer exists. And the economic system, there's no longer slave or free. So it's a call to new being. And the type of Christianity that wants Jesus on the labels but doesn't want the new being, doesn't want to include people who are different. They don't mean to do it, but they renounce Christ with every breath.

Did you notice that the state of Texas is going to delay the statistics on maternal morbidity until after the election is over. How do you little ladies feel about that? That's murderous. The right-to-life movement is murderous because it interferes in the personal medical decisions that women make that are none of the State's business. It endangers their life, and learning about it after the election can prevent some women from realizing that they do not have the same constitutional rights over their bodies that men have over their rifles, and to realize what incredible dehumanization that is. That cannot happen in Christ. Somebody is missing the connections when they can't realize that women and LGBTQ people and everybody else on the planet deserves the same basic human rights.

There's also in this image of a schema the image of Christ, or the image of God, that human beings are supposedly created in this image. So part of it is remembering that and not demeaning yourself by throwing the virtues away. A Christianity that teaches you to be afraid of immigrants, or transgender children, or other people is not a religion of Love. Love casts out fear. So if you miss the image of God in yourself, that's bad. But if you can't see it in other people, that's bad too. And the challenge for us on the progressive side of things is to see that in people who are right now lying about us and trying to hurt us. We have to resist the oppression without losing the humanity. When we lose the humanity of the other, we lose our own humanity. You can't separate those two. But that really doesn't divide liberal-conservative. It's like, are you participating in the oppression of others or not? That's the question. Not if you're sexist or racist, but are you participating in sexist and racist structures?

There was somebody from Germany— and it's strange how these quotes from 1934 sound so modern. A German said,

It wasn't Hitler or Himmler who deported me, beat me, and shot my family. It was the shoemaker, the milkman, the neighbor who were given a uniform and then believed they were the master race."

Do you realize that the cult of MAGA is a synonym for being the Übermensch, being the superior, the real American, the real Christian?

So, to realize that our value comes from who we are as human beings, not any of the traits, not our T-count, not our ability to be toxically masculine, but just who we are as a human being. That's the image out of which we're created. And then finally, when we feel completely helpless,

when we don't know if the system is redeemable, to realize that we can still be the change that the world needs. That was Gandhi's solution. When you don't know what to do, be the change you want to see in the world. Give people a glimmer of what humanity can really look like.

Paul talked about new humanity, new being. Living out the new being, finding your humanity that's deeper than your gender, that's deeper than your economic condition, deeper even than your religion, gives people a hint about the direction to go. Into the future. But when the Church does not see the image of God in a transgender child, they have renounced Christ. When the Church does not see the image of God in an immigrant, they have renounced Jesus Christ. We are called to resist evil but to not become evil, to realize that hate will never cast out hate in 1,000 years. But when we Love, we bring the possibility of a new path, a new way.

When I was in seminary, I had no idea the trail I was heading out on. I don't know if I could go back. Actually, I wouldn't take anything back at all. But I thought I was going to have a big library and just be really popular and talk about wisdom all day. That's not what the world needs from us. We have to get in trouble, but it has to be trouble because we love. Once we start fighting for love, we're lost, and that's what our word today reminds us.

You can't be cruel in the name of kindness. You can't lie to establish truth, but you can be the change that the world needs. This week our staff has been kind of furiously trying to think about how to talk to y'all about what is happening. You don't want to scare everybody away. And so we talked about how do you talk about the spies in a way that doesn't frighten people? How do you talk about the possibility of these protests? And we sent emails back and forth. Destiny is kind of the heartbeat of the church, and she sent this out to me raising the question about what do we say. She said,

Yes, people do need to know there may be spies and that we have nothing to hide. We preach a message of nonviolence, but we do not back down from bullies. That there may indeed be congregants who wish we didn't have an oppressive dictator in leadership.

I think that's talking about Trump, not me. She wasn't specific there, (laughter) but she said, *but church is where we come to deal with our pain, to turn that pain into activism, into hope, into love.*

So I think our situation invites us to go deeper into community, become an eye in the storm for each other, and to remind ourselves and others in the community what it means to be truly human.

Benediction

Rev. Carol Johnson

A Celtic blessing for you. May you find yourself in love. May you find yourself in kindness. May you find yourself in listening. May you find yourself in simple things. And may you find yourself at peace. Amen.

Transcribed and edited by a member of the St. Andrew's Sermon Transcription Project.

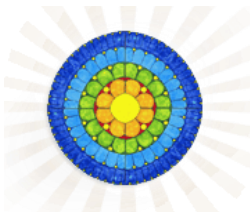
Our Vision Statement

St. Andrews will be a church that celebrates and lives Christ's universal love in the modern world.

Our Mission Statement

The mission of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church is to learn and teach the radical and universal love of Jesus Christ by:

- ❖ Nurturing individual spirituality and growth*
- ❖ Fostering a community that shares and celebrates the circle of life*
- ❖ Providing space and time for personal and communal reverence*
- ❖ Championing the cause of human-kind and courageously acting to overcome injustice*



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