



LESSONS IN LIVING

Loving Through Difficult Times

“Part 9: Love Doesn’t rejoice over injustice but rejoices in the truth”

A St. Andrew’s Sermon
Delivered by Dr. Jim Rigby
October 11, 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

Well, it's this time of MAGA. From now on, whenever I hear the Apostles' Creed and it gets to that part where Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate, I'll understand the political implications that are there and what looks like just a theological creed, that this brave little community has been vilified and attacked. And I'm so proud of all of you, because you're in trouble for loving the people that they hate. And what Paul said is that's a badge of honor. Those scars are badges of honor. Thank you.

We're still getting videos from the spies. So if after church somebody comes up to talk to you with strange questions about the church, this is not a good time for humor. Sarcasm is not going to look good on the video. But I don't think it's working. I mean, obviously they're trying to attack somebody else, but they're attacking him because he stands up for the people that they don't want to count. So this is a time when churches all over the country are finding their courage. And as bad as the MAGA years are, it's the best of times, the worst of times, because there's never been a better teachable moment for Americans to realize that we've never been willing to look at our own evil. And as long as we blame it on Donald Trump, we're missing the point. These are prejudices that have been here from the very start. Racism, sexism, this theocracy, fascism is not new. It's always haunted the American psyche.

So this is a chance for us to exercise. and this passage, the love passage, is one of the best places to do that. The Greek words that he uses are in philosophy, religion around the world, and that's what we're looking at, to realize how much deeper this passage is than you may have been taught, originally, that the words in English are beautiful, but he's using another language and it really helps to get to the depths.

But I also want to share with you a letter I got a couple of days ago from the stated clerk of the National Church. And we're not in trouble (laughter) which hasn't always been the case, but the denomination has changed. And the grace to all people is something that's a given now. And you go to Presbyterian meetings and they talk about justice. I mean, it's been decades since our Presbytery had the courage to talk about justice. So as bad as it is, if we can realize that we have been wedded to some very evil things, not because we are evil, but because we're complacent. And there are people who need us to find our courage. And that's what the call to love is about.

Let me read this letter that she sent. “Dear Reverend Dr. Rigby”— A little respect, a little respect. (laughter) So that shows she doesn't know me (laughter) to put that in there. Whoops.

“Greetings in the name of Christ Jesus. I've been meaning to email you for a little time now after I started receiving emails from someone who identified as Presbyterian. The writer of the email wrote allegations about St. Andrew's that she thought I should be interested in and concerned about.” So let's clean up your act. *“I assumed that there was more going on and wondered about checking with the Presbytery leaders and you. Eventually, I found out through Presbytery leadership connections about what has happened with those trying to discredit this church. I have not responded to the writer of the emails because it seemed like she was fishing for some response that she could use to further the aims of whatever group she's working with. but I have been praying for you and the church as you face this particular time. Is there anything that I can do beyond prayer and support? Please let me know. Grateful for your ministry and leadership.”*

(applause)

So, and that's the person that's chartered with, you know, checking the rule books.

The gospel is not heresy. Putting Jesus ahead of the atonement theories of the church is not heresy. The Sermon on the Mount is not heresy. It's the anchor. And we have to realize that when Jesus was teaching, he was there. He wasn't dead. So when they talked about the cross, it wasn't this symbol of some supernatural atonement. It was a death threat from empire telling the people to stay in their place. And when they took up the cross, that was courage. It wasn't fear of hell. It was saying, *“I'm going to be a human being and love my human family no matter what. I'm not going to let empire and militarism frighten me into silence.”*

For Paul, it looks to me like when he used the word love, it was a balance of all the virtues. I've mentioned this before, there were 4 classic humanist values that I think are important to remember, but you need to come up with your own list because remember, these were also people who defended slavery and mistreated women. We're learning from the classics, but we're not imitating them.

Courage. Someone may love you very much, but if they don't have courage, they can't be your friend. You can love them, but they cannot love back consistently. They can do it in spurts. But if somebody's afraid of intimacy, and it takes a whole lot more courage to be vulnerable than it does to be violent. And that's something this nation needs to learn. Mr. Rogers is much more of a man than Pete Hegseth. Because before you can be a man, you have to be a human being. So, courage, temperance. We have to be in balance. If I can't control my desires, I will betray you. Temperance was the virtue of artists because an artist is entering into these depths of feeling and that needs to be balanced and harmonized. There's an art to that. And then wisdom. If I live in denial of science and medicine, If I don't listen to objective news, I'm going to believe lies that will make it very hard for me to understand what universal human rights even are. And then justice, which we talk about a lot.

So when Jesus talked about happiness, And that's kind of our topic today. How is it that we seek happiness in a way that doesn't hurt others, that doesn't enslave us to addictions, that doesn't isolate us from other people? Paul wrote that he had learned to be happy no matter what his circumstances were. This was on his way to be executed, but he had learned through these philosophical writings and through his struggle and through what he knew of Jesus to live in his character, not his reputation, in his character, not his fate. Virtues are not just rules. They're the principles of your own humanity. They're what make you a person and, and give you an integrity through the storm. You don't have to be defined by the chaos that you're facing.

When Jesus talked about happiness, it was in the Beatitudes. He knew that some of the people were not going to be able to experience what we call happiness. But there's a deeper joy that can be there regardless of what's happening. Now, none of us is so strong that no matter what happens, we can have balance and peace. Sometimes life is too much. We're very frail vessels, so we can get exhausted, and that's not failure. But today, the little snippet of the love passage we're going to look at. There it is.

My purpose is not to teach Greek, but my purpose is to get past the kind of European understanding that we've been given. And to do that, it's helpful to learn what these words— how much richer they were. So the translation is, and we'll look at the individual words in just a second, “Love does not rejoice in injustice, but rejoices in the truth,” which is kind of a strange twist in there, injustice and then truth. But in the world that had been exposed to Plato, The one, and God, and the truth were different names for something that was deeper, that undergirds us, that holds us together, that it's our ground of being. So let's go to the first slide. Oh, this is it. This is the only slide there is.

οὐ χαίρει ἐπὶ τῇ ἀδικίᾳ, δὲ συνχαίρει de te ἀληθείᾳ
Ou chair api tE adikia, de sunchairei de te althEtheia
**(Love) doesn't rejoice in injustice,
but rejoices in the truth**

Does not rejoice over unrighteousness, but rejoices together with the truth. The chair thing is the English attempt to get, like, the word that people get charity from. Joy, happiness. In the ancient world, they tried to figure out what is the highest good. And it's helpful, I think, to go through and listen to how they struggled with that. Because we use words like truth and good, and we don't really think about what they mean. So it was Cicero that came up with the idea of *summum bonum*. the highest good. And for him, that was happiness. Now, the Stoics disagreed and said it's virtue. But what I think Cicero was trying to get at is if we're honest with ourselves, that's the steering wheel. And if we realize that we want to be happy, that doesn't make us selfish if we realize every other person wants to be happy too.

When we take joy out of the calling, it doesn't hardly seem worth the trip. Life should be a call to joy, and joy should be a reminder that you're getting as close to love as you can. We can't capture it. Who was it? I think it was Confucius that said we should look after truth like somebody who you can't catch up to, but you don't want to lose them. That we get glimpses throughout our lives. And that question of what happiness is for you is one of the most important questions that if you can ask it, it will change your life.

I can't do that. I can't come in through your heart. That's something that only you can do. What are you calling happiness? Is it coming from your heart or is it what somebody told you that happiness is? Because I got to tell you, preachers aren't always real honest. (laughter) And it's not that we're bad people, but you've been to seminary, you have all this knowledge, and you think it's important.

I got saved by doing a chaplaincy year and realizing this isn't helping people. That what I was being taught in seminary when somebody's dying, it just wasn't helping. So we have to enter into other people's world, but it has to start in our own heart usually.

There are things that make us happy for a time and then make us miserable for a long time. To realize that is not like a rule. You realize it's in my best interest. It's in my highest interest to have a mature idea of what's going to make me happy. Because if what makes me happy now puts my happiness at risk later, then that's not the path to happiness. If what makes me happy makes the people I love unhappy, that's not a good path either. If what makes me happy leaves an impoverished world for children yet to be born, then my idea of happiness needs to be opened up and blossom. I don't need to deny my own happiness.

If we only didn't die, Ayn Rand would be the smartest person that ever lived. But because we do die, it's not in our best interest to be selfish. When we think of what our life really is, we're born into this world, we manifest something that's deeper than we know. There's a life within us that goes beyond what we can comprehend. And it calls us to a certain kind of living. If we say yes to that, we give ourselves to life. If we simply just hoard things, what a tragedy that is when we do realize that none of that has any meaning whatsoever. The meaning of our life is to give ourselves to the world. from our deepest gifts.

Aristotle, I mean, he's kind of an egghead. But he was also really helpful when you want to understand what words, you know, begin that questioning yourself what different words mean. And he wrote a book to his son on ethics. And this is how he defined happiness.

Happiness is eudaimonia.

Back in those days, they didn't think of demons as something evil. That was the kind of inner experience of the spirit.

A Greek word translated as flourishing, well-being, or living a good and active life. It is not a fleeting emotional state or a passing feeling of pleasure. Instead, it is the ultimate end and purpose of human existence. The highest good. Happiness is the only thing humans purely pursue for its own sake rather than a means to reach something else, unlike wealth, honor, power, which are wanted to get other things.

I learned this when I was young. It was my job to come up with games for my brothers. And being a bad person, I came up with a game called Evil Genie, which was me. And what the game was is they would make a wish, and then the evil genie would mess it up, whatever it was. If somebody wanted \$1 million, then they got a million Monopoly dollars or a million Confederate dollars or money that had been stolen from somewhere else. So that was fun for a while, but then one day they started asking for virtues. And what I realized was I couldn't mess those up, at least not as easy.

Happiness, courage, justice, temperance, wisdom are things that don't belong to fate. They're the property of the soul. They're the treasures of the heart. And if we can make those our central treasure, we have a foundation that doesn't blow in the wind. As long as I base my happiness on what happens to me or what other people think of me or even what I think of myself, then I'm robbing myself of the only treasures the heart can really hold.

It was C.S. Lewis that said, don't base your happiness on something you might lose. And I think that's this little nibbit here. Character, not fate. And then the second part of it is injustice. A-D-I-K-I-A. The second part of that is the worst translated word in the English Bible. It means justice. But it's translated as though it meant morality. Righteousness, what does that mean?

So Plato gave it a twin meaning. It was integrity for the person, what holds you together, the virtues that hold you together, and you have to decide what those are. And then what makes you a good citizen of the whole? And those work in conjunction. Somebody said justice is born a twin. It has to be internal where you have integrity, but it also has to be this gift to the world.

In addition to the summum bonum, which Cicero came up with, other philosophers said there's a *Totum Bonum* which means the widest good. So what makes you happy if it makes somebody else unhappy, isn't as happy as you can be. If I'm happy but the people I love are unhappy, that's not as happy as I can be. If you love somebody, their unhappiness affects you. So this step is to say, don't define happiness in a way that hurts other people. Base your happiness on something that's good for you and also good for others. So it's not asking you to be different, it's asking you to harmonize, to calibrate the thing that's most important to you, this— that pursuit of happiness, to base it on your highest values.

The United States is the only country I can think of that has right-to-life people that are going to have public executions. How sick do you have to be? The United States is checking out of the international courts because they're calling us to an international standard and Americans are too good for that. That didn't start with Trump. If we just blame everything on Trump, we're not going to learn the lesson. Trump is the underbelly of the American dream that we've never wanted to look at. And if we can find that courage, we could blossom into the imperfect dream that our founders had.

They didn't include everybody. We can. We must. And the thing is, the world doesn't have to change for you to become the ambassador for that world. In fact, if you start now and you give your life to this, that will give you a life worth living no matter what happens. Because it's the times without hope that people who live, uh, for this gift are the most important people in history.

Long before Martin Luther King, somebody loved that little boy and saw something valuable and important and prophetic. It may not be in your lifetime, but that doesn't make it any less important. It makes it even more important. The bleaker it is, the more important your light is.

Don't let the hatred of the MAGA movement rob you of your love. Make your love brighter. Don't let the dishonesty of the MAGA movement rob you of your truth. So your joy needs to also be based on this understanding of justice. It's sort of the bodhisattva vow. May all beings be blessed by my life. Then finally, the last idea is also a negative, althEtheia. That last word there, A Whenever you see an A in a Greek word, it's usually at the beginning, it usually means it's a negative. Agnostic.

The Greeks believed that when you die, you went across the River Styx and you drank a liquid that we get the word lethargy from. Truth for them is not forgetting. It's remembering what it means to be human in the worst of times, which is why it matches with the injustice piece. I remember in the early churches I went to, at the communion, it had a thing, remember me. I think Jesus is speaking as life itself. Speaking from within us to call us to our own core.

To teach belief, you only need a confirmation class, but to teach awareness, you need a Brillo pad. Because awareness, and that's what Jesus would be talking about. Belief doesn't lead you to love. Have you ever noticed somebody with tunnel vision with theology that was a loving person? It's hard. But to be aware and to fall in love with truth, whatever it is. To fall in love with reality, I think, is the calling here. Because when our love is based on some fantasy, we won't recognize the beloved when they're right in front of us.

So fall in love, but fall in love like a scientist does. Like a biologist falls in love with all of life, not just the parts we like, the whole circle of life. Fall in love with it. Test yourself. Fact-check yourself. Do not think that what the church taught you, that ideas are true because you believe in them. That is not this kind of truth. Truth is that calling within you to get closer to real people, to real life. And that's what the world is groping for.

I've seen pictures of the new press secretary for the president. She's got the Barbie part covered. But they'll have to teach her the DARVO technique, which is a very important part of the MAGA movement. DARVO means deny, attack, reverse the roles of the victim and the oppressor. So when you see somebody from MAGA, you see the same thing. He didn't do it. He didn't mean it. Fake news. You're all just making this up. And then attack you that we should have expected that from a scientist, from somebody from the New York Times, from a real journalist, from somebody with a medical degree. It's brainwashing. So the moment that you're attacked, you realize this is not a conversation. And you're fully justified in disregarding what's being said.

How do we hold ourselves together through the storm? That's the gift I think Paul is trying to give us. But we have to ask the question, what is our understanding of happiness? What is the happiness that we're seeking for? Does it just make me happy now but makes me sad later? Does it make me happy but hurt the people that I love? Does it make me happy but make the world a sadder place?

Because ultimately, the essence of religion is the fact that you are an expression of a deeper life than you can know. And you have a gift to give the world. Hoarding is not your purpose. Your purpose is to empty yourself. Zen Master Suzuki said, burn yourself like a good fire, leaving no ashes behind. Give yourself fully to love and know that that life will change the world.

It's been said that people are like tea bags. You don't know who they are until they're in boiling water. That's 100 times truer of a church. Well, we're in boiling water, and we have the opportunity to turn that into love, to show a wounded, frightened world what it means to be human. But we have to do that first ourselves.

This is what Elizabeth Kübler-Ross said about sort of this— to realize that painful moments, we avoid them when we can, but to realize that love transforms even pain into something that's important. She was the expert on death and dying.

The most beautiful people we have known are those who have known defeat, known suffering, known struggle, known loss, and have found their way out of the depths. These persons have an appreciation, a sensitivity, an understanding of life that fills them with compassion, gentleness, and a deep loving concern. Beautiful people don't just happen.

When you talk to loving people, they've usually been through a whole lot of pain, and that's how they can empathize with you. So that's what your pain can become. You can love people that nobody else understands. If instead of saying no to life, you let love transform it.

Last word goes to Walt Whitman. He calls us to happiness, not in another place, but in this place, not for another hour, but for this hour.

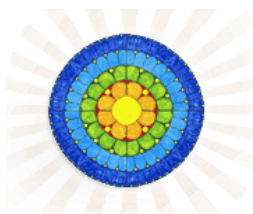
Thank you for your kind attention. We'll take a moment now for you to think about your own reflections on these words. Thank you.

Benediction

Rev. Carol Johnson

Friends, as you go forward, may your happiness be based on love more than belief, knowing that you are following Jesus' example. Only you know what that means for you, but know that you are not alone as you figure it out. Amen. You have the love that birthed you, the love that is inside of you, the love that is around you, and this community to help you go forth in love. Amen.

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



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