**Sermon Luke 7:27-38 20/2/22**

**Youtube Video Link:** <https://youtu.be/Ks8_QCoyy0k>

Recently my grandson sent me a text proposing that he could do odd jobs for me in return for me taking him driving to do his required hours for his license. It so happened that I had some work that needed doing in the garden and we came to an agreement. He did a few hours of work for me and did an excellent job by the way, and in return, I gave him a few hours of driving time for his license.

Often that is how relationships work in our world. There is this unwritten rule in some relationships that if you do a friend a good turn, you can expect that your friend will do you a good turn in the future. If you are in need, you expect a friend to help and if your friend is in need, you feel obliged to help them. At some level, this unwritten rule is not restricted only to friendships. It can also find its way into family relationships, between husband and wife, between parents and children and between siblings. Often this works quite well because most people understand the rules.

Sometimes people don’t follow the rules. If you continually find yourself helping a certain friend but when you ask that friend for help and they let you down, then they have broken the rules. If they break the rules too often you might begin to feel like the relationship is one-sided and you may get upset. Often such relationships fall apart because one person feels like they have given far more than they have received, feeling used, they decide they no longer want that person as a friend.

The problem is that at its core, a relationship based on what people can do for each other, is little more than a business relationship and it has very little to do with love. Friendships, family relationships and even marriages that at their core are about what each person can get out of it, are on rocky ground.

My grandson has done a good amount of very good work in my garden, and he has received his fair share of hours of driving, but now there is very little work left that he can do. If the relationship was all about what we could get out of it, I would not be offering any more of my time to take him driving.

Thankfully our relationship is nothing like a business relationship. Yes, him working for me in return for driving time was a good lesson to learn, but now that he has no more work to do for me, I will still take him out driving.

Why? Because our relationship is based on love. I love my grandson and the truth is I would have taken him out driving even if he couldn’t work for me. In relationships based on love, we do things for other people because love motivates us to do what is best for them. Loving relationships are nothing like business relationships where each party keeps a record of how many favours they have done. In loving relationships, people will do things for the ones they love without any expectation of payment or favours in return. That is because love is generous.

Loving relationships can also have rough patches. Sometimes the person we care about does or says something hurtful and upsets us. They tell a lie, break confidence, gossip about us, break a promise, judge us unfairly, upset someone else we care about, play favourites, fail to help us when we are in need or do something we don’t approve. There are countless ways those we care about can upset us. We can respond in anger and seek retribution. Sometimes that is what people do. They get angry and lash out at the person who has upset them. They judge and condemn. The problem is that retribution leads to a downward spiral that can permanently destroy the relationship.

If we value the other person and we want to salvage the relationship. If we genuinely love the person then we will react differently. Instead of revenge and retribution, we may offer mercy and forgiveness. Instead of judging and condemning them, we may try to look at things from their point of view and seek to understand why they have done or said hurtful things. We take an honest look at ourselves because often we have contributed to the conflict. Put simply, we will give them another go, and then another go... Not so we can be walked over, but to provide room for change. To reset the relationship and open the possibility of true understanding and reconciliation.

That is how God responds to us human beings when we do and say hurtful things. Even while we were still enemies of God, Jesus died for us. Again and again, we discover that God doesn’t give us everything we deserve. Instead of just punishment, God hands us mercy, generous and abundant mercy. Hanging on the cross, Jesus doesn’t ask for justice, instead, Jesus says, “Father forgive them.”

We may be able to imagine being merciful to someone we love if they hurt us, but can you imagine showing the same mercy to an enemy?

Have you ever wondered what would happen if you treat your enemies and those who hate you the same way you treat someone you love? What would the world be like if people did good things for those who hate them? What would happen if you did not judge your enemies and condemn them but instead gave them the benefit of a doubt and even forgave them? Now that would be a very different world, wouldn’t it? In such a world may be conflicts would be far less common and maybe sometimes your enemies would become friends and those who hated you would end up loving you?

Of course, such a thing does not come naturally to us human beings – to love our enemies. Yet that is what Jesus calls us to do. To love those who hate you. To bless those who curse you, to pray for those who ill-treat you? Such a thing – to love your enemies - can only flow from a love that is greater than our own. A life that flows from the gifts God has first given to us. The gift of mercy and forgiveness, the gift of freedom from condemnation, the gift of unconditional love and freedom from sin, death, and the devil.

Wow. A world where people love their enemies. Can you imagine it? Maybe that is what the kingdom of God looks like. Maybe that is what life to the full looks like. A life of love lived in relationship with all people, and a life of love lived in a relationship with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Pastor Rolf Lungwitz