

North Kildonan United Church

20th February 2022 ~Rev. Don Johnson

“Love and Do Good”

Psalm 37: 1-11, 39-40

1 Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-50

Luke 6: 27-38

Grant, O God, that in the written word and through the spoken word, we may behold the living Word, our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

During my years of study at the Vancouver School of Theology, where I earned a Masters of Divinity degree, the essential academic qualification for ordination, I lived in residence with a variety of students. Most of my fellow residents were enrolled in a variety of non-religious academic pursuits at the University of British Columbia. So we had Arts students, Science students, Engineering students, and so on. Living in amongst these students in the residences were a few of us *theologs*, as we were called, theological students, usually a bit older but not necessarily wiser than the rest.

Years before, well before my time, each of the three residences were filled entirely by theological students. That was in an earlier time, back when the United Church placed two storeys of student housing in their main building, the Iona building, and the Anglican Church had two separate buildings, Canterbury House for women and Trinity House for men. When those residences were built, there were far more theological students needing simple accommodations, because most of them were single, in their twenties, and just starting out. Trends changed and more second career people entered ministry, which usually meant partners, possibly children as well, and probably living off campus in an apartment. So the doors were opened to the general university community.

But there were a few theological students such as myself living there.

One fellow theological student who stands out in my memory was Bert. He was in his final year at the school, though not that much older than myself. There was a delightful eccentricity with Bert. He had a substantial sound system in his room, on which he played classical music. He had a dry sense of humour, smoked a pipe on occasion and usually drank his single malt scotch out of a Bunnykin's double handled children's mug.

Later that year Bert graduated, was ordained, settled in Saskatchewan, and then married. I stopped in on him one September when I was driving back to Vancouver. I remember Bert asking me to pick up some beer for him because he dared not buy anything in town. Not only that, but I had to hide the beverages in a duffle bag because his neighbour, who was not United Church but active in a more conservative church in town, might see what was coming into the manse and talk!

When his son was born, Bert began a practice that I believe he continued as long as he could. Each day Bert would take his son to the living room and play an hour of

recorded classical music, with the hope that his son would develop an appreciation for the music. I never heard how that turned out, but if nothing else I would think it was a wonderful parent/child bonding time.

But I would hope for more than that. Hope that a love of music would develop within the boy, that the gift of music his father was offering him each day would help shape and enrich his life, and that, as the years went on, when he would hear his father's music, warm memories of those earlier experiences might come to him.

We might say that what Bert was cultivating within his son was a habit of the heart. Through sharing something so life-giving as an appreciation of music, Bert was offering to his son something of great value, a blessing that would help shape and enrich him in the years ahead.

In today's gospel we have Jesus offering us wisdom to shape our own lives and attitudes, to cultivate our own habits of the heart.

“Do to others as you would have them do to you.”

“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.”

“Do not judge, and you will not be judged.”

“Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give and it will be given to you.”

Easy words to say, to print on posters or greeting cards, or perhaps even on protest trucks, but they are more than mere sentiments. Think of what Jesus is saying, saying to each of us. But before that, think of who Jesus is and what he represents.

Jesus preached about the kingdom, which was all about generosity, extravagant, over the top generosity. A generosity based in the loving kindness of God. God is generous to all people; the rain falls on the just and the unjust. God is forgiving and long suffering. God's generosity was reflected in the life of Christ, in his refusal to condemn and his speed to forgive, in his willingness to suffer for others and ultimately to die for all. Jesus is inviting those who wish to follow him to have the same heart of love that he has.

Tom Wright sums this up marvellously. He writes: *"Think of the best thing you can do for the worst person, and go ahead and do it. Think of what you'd really like someone to do for you, and do it for them. Think of the people to whom you are tempted to be nasty, and lavish generosity on them instead. These instructions have a fresh, spring-like quality. They are all about new life bursting out energetically, like flowers growing through concrete and startling everyone with their colour and vigour."*

He continues: *"Jesus' point was not to provide his followers with a new rule-book, a list of do's and don'ts that you could tick off one by one, and sit back satisfied at the end of a successful moral day. The point was to inculcate, and illustrate, an attitude of heart, a lightness of spirit in the face of all that the world can throw at you. And at the*

centre of it is the thing that motivates and gives colour to the whole: you are to be like this because that's what God is like. God is generous to all people, generous to a fault."

The gospels tell us of the extravagant generosity Jesus expressed in his life and his teachings. In his exuberant generosity Jesus gave all he had to give to everyone who needed it.

Tom Wright continues: *"Jesus was speaking of what he knew: the extravagant love of his Father, and the call to live a lavish human life in response. And finally, when they struck him on the cheek and ripped the coat and shirt off his back, he went on loving and forgiving, as Luke will tell us later. He didn't show love only to his friends, but to his enemies, weeping over the city that had rejected his plea for peace. He was the true embodiment of the God of whom he spoke."*

My friend Bert showed his love for his son in so many ways, and one of those ways was by sharing with him a profound love of music. Jesus invites us to open our hearts to the generous love of God and in turn to share that generous love as we able. As John Wesley said:

“Do all the good you can,
By all the means you can,
In all the ways you can,
In all the places you can,
At all the times you can,
To all the people you can,
As long as ever you can.”
Amen.