

# Love should lead...

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*Richard Dawson Sunday 9 March 2014*

1 Cor 13<sup>1-7</sup>/Luke 9<sup>51-56</sup>/Matt 5<sup>43-48</sup>

[Video – Wedding proposal]

Do you remember what it's like to be rejected? I guess this is a little bit drastic but I want you for a moment to feel what it's like to be rejected. Men, please don't let destroy all you more romantic instincts. Women – please be gentle!

In a reading today, Jesus is rejected. The village of Samaritans wants nothing to do with Him. They send his little advance party running. 'Don't come here. You're not welcome. Perhaps even more is implied – 'You'll be harmed if you come here. Your rejection will be violent. Jesus is inclined just to move on but not the disciples. They are incensed. They want the village to pay – they want them to know whom it is they've rejected. They want some payback, 'Shall we call down fire from heaven on them Jesus?' So we have this contrast. His reaction to rejection is to simply do as they ask – to move on. The disciples James and John nicknamed the Sons of Thunder have a different idea. They want to see them suffer. They want them judged. They want them punished but when they suggest this to Jesus He rebukes them.

Now we are not given the details of the rebuke but it must have been pretty sobering. The word rebuke is used by Jesus about 8 times in the Gospels 6 of which refer to his addressing a demon or some other evil manifestation. Only twice do we find Jesus using it against another person and those person's happen, on both occasions, to be three disciples. The first time he uses it it is directed at Peter and the second time it is directed at these two, James and John. What I'm saying is that this is a rare occasion. This was something serious. Jesus had to be very cheesed off to have addressed them in this manner.

What did they do wrong? Didn't these rude Samaritans need to be taught a lesson? Didn't they make a significant mistake? Wasn't some rebuking of them required rather than the disciples? This has to be a really significant deal for Jesus to be climbing into them but what was it that they did so wrong?

What are we to do in the face of such rejection? What is a Christian response? Well the Bible is reasonably clear about this. In this very chapter Jesus outlines the appropriate response to rejection when He says...

**<sup>3</sup>“Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money—not even an extra tunic. <sup>4</sup>Whatever house you enter, stay there, and leave from there. <sup>5</sup>Wherever they do not welcome you, as you are leaving that town shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.” (Luke 9)**

More than this however there are some significant indications that in the face of our enemies we are to behave very differently to James and John.

**<sup>43</sup>“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ <sup>44</sup>But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup>so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. <sup>46</sup>For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? <sup>47</sup>And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? <sup>48</sup>Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matt 5)**

For Jesus, the primary rule of engagement wasn't to win, it was to love. In the Church we are to **lead with love**. Love is to be our initiative and our strategy; it is to be our technique and our story; it is to be our starting place and what we're aiming for.

What does it mean then to '**lead with love**?' In the very first place it means to honour the 'personhood of each other' – and for we who are Christ-followers this means to honour the fact that the other person is made in God's image. The great need of every person is to be treated as a person – to be treated as someone who has intrinsic value not because of what they've done or haven't done but because of their basic humanity. We

have rules – important rules – rules which define a life well lived. But **we** are **not** rules – **we** are **not** simply creatures who can or should be understood by the rules we keep or don't keep. When God is creating in Genesis, after He has formed the sky and the dry ground He begins to create life and He begins with vegetation and once this creative act is finished God pronounces a verdict over it and this verdict is... 'And God saw that it was good.' And then God creates the sun, moon and stars and the verdict is the same. And it's the same for the sea creatures and the birds and for the land animals. But then God creates humankind and once He has done this He pronounces another verdict and that verdict is this... '**And God saw that it was very good.**' God values us from the very start – not because of what we've done or haven't done but because we are His creation. The fall doesn't change this valuing. Christ comes to restore the knowledge of God's love to all Creation. The Church's job is to demonstrate that love within its own life and to all others. In other words... **God always leads with love.**

Last time I spoke I said this... to connect we have to compromise. Today I want to dig a little deeper. You see when we compromise in order to make connection – when stoop down to reach out to another; when we give away something we hold precious in order to connect we are, in fact, allowing love to direct us.

Love is, indeed, the Divine imperative in regard to our attitude and approach to others. When we act in love and with love we are doing all we can to reach out. When we act outside of love then there will always be more we could do. God leads with love. We should lead with love.

The big question for us is what it means to lead with love. Most people will agree that love is important if not vital but what does it mean to allow love to lead us with people?

Some basic principles can be gleaned from our readings today. They are 1. Mercy and grace should be our primary attitude towards others. 2. Reject meeting evil with evil. 3. Believe always in God's ability to redeem what we cannot. Letting me quickly just go through each of these.

Firstly, mercy and grace should be our primary attitude towards others. For years I suspect that it has been taught that our role in society as Christians should be to represent God's judgement. I don't find this anywhere in the Gospels. I believe Jesus taught His disciples to believe the best of people until they were rejected and if and when they were rejected their job was not to pronounce judgement but to leave them alone – to leave them to God.

Reject meeting evil with evil. Jesus refused the request of James and John to reign down fire upon the Samaritan village. Jesus didn't ever do anything like this in His ministry despite being

rejected many times. His 'judgements' when expressed, focus three things. Firstly in Matthew they focus on **not judging...**

**Judge not, that you be not judged. (Matthew 7:1)**

Or on the judgement to come at the end of time...

**Of that day or that hour no one knows, not even angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Take heed, watch; for you do not know when the time will come. (Mark 13:32-33)**

Or they specifically fall on the corrupt and moribund religious leaders of the days...

**Woe to you, Pharisees! for you tithe mint and rue and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God. (Luke 11:42)**

Finally, any thought that Jesus led with judgement simply has to be rejected. This is not how he entered into relationship with people and neither is it how he presented the Gospel. The dominant theme of the Gospel was the call to 'Come to the God who created you and who loves you.'

**<sup>28</sup>"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup>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. <sup>30</sup>For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matt 11)**

Again, please hear me here. It's not that Jesus doesn't refer often to the fact that our sins are judged and will be judged or that His very ministry brings that judgement by shedding light on what it wrong. Rather, Jesus doesn't reach people with Judgement – it's not His opening game; it's not His primary task. Rather, as He says...

**<sup>10</sup>The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. (John 10)**

**Lead with love friends. Have the attitude of mercy. Do not return evil for evil and judge not lest you be judged.**