**What Does it Mean to Love Others?** Psalms 1, Matthew 22:36-40, Romans 13:8-10

At this point within the Lenten liturgy from Spill the Beans it is about self-care, and our readings are about the need to love one another as we love ourselves. When we are focused on love instead of fear, hate, or vindictiveness we are more apt to be calmer and happier, and to be the people God wants us to be. From the readings for today I took away that our self-care relies heavily on being able to love everyone, as Paul stated in the reading last week “genuinely”. When we follow God’s script for love, our love is more automatic, something that is part of our natural being.

All the readings this morning speak of the law to love one another. In the Psalm reading this morning we are told that “Blessed are those who follow the law of God”, and that “God watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish”. Secondly, in the Matthew reading when asked, what was the greatest law, Jesus responded “You shall Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the greatest and first of the Commandments. But then Jesus also says that “You shall love your neighbour as yourself, and that these two commandments guide all the other laws, and the prophets. Finally, in the Roman’s reading we are told that we “Owe no one anything”. Then we are once again reminded that if we love one another, we have fulfilled the law. In this reading we are also presented with a snapshot or the laws we are to follow that are considered the not to’s. We are not to commit adultery, murder anyone, covet property or members of your neighbours family, you are not to curse your persecutor, don’t be haughty with anyone, don’t claim to be wiser than you are, don’t respond to evil with evil, you are not to avenge yourself, Paul says that God will handle the wicked, we are to just leave it to God. Paul states that “Love does no wrong to a neighbour, therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law”.

When I look at our world today, I shudder at what a mess we are in. But it is not hopeless. Each and every time I read these scriptures, I am reminded of my responsibility in God’s world, and I am also provided with hope. Last week the Romans 12:9-21 reading was so clear as to what the law of loving one another looks like in action, and how we should be, not only with one another here, but with the strangers who will cross our paths today and in the future. Paul reminded people that they were to rejoice with those rejoicing, and weep with those who were weeping. He says it is okay to hate what is evil, but we are still supposed to love all, even those committing the evil. Now this is probably the hard part for most of us, we are to love even those who are doing evil.

I struggle with loving especially when those doing the harm are hurting my family friends, neighbour, those who are vulnerable in our communities and worldwide. When I see all the evil that is happening in the USA right now, I am struggling with loving Trump or Musk and those following and supporting the wickedness, I pray for them, but I am struggling with loving them genuinely, instead of begrudgingly. When they are spouting racist comments, reverting their military back to being white males only, and assuming people of colour, 2SLGBTQIA+ communities,and other nationalities do not have the knowledge or experience to work for and/or run government agencies, I struggle to love them. When, they threaten to annex Canada, I struggle with loving them. When I see how they are reverting back to the racist, homophobic, and bigoted nation they were before and into the 1960’s, I struggle with loving them. Although it is so easy to focus on the USA, our country is not perfect. We must be careful about pointing fingers, it is not state bodies alone that practice exclusion through racism, homophobia, and bigotry, individuals do it too right here in this country, this province, and this city. I hate the evil of those who intentionally inflict harm onto others, especially those in power who should know better, and those making decisions knowing it will hurt people, I have trouble loving those people. I know that praying for those who are hurting others helps me deal with my struggles and I find it a bit easier to love. So, lately I have been doing a whole lot more praying for the perpetrators of evil and asking for guidance for me in finding ways to be able to love these people. I am not perfect at loving all genuinely, but I’m slowly getting there. I know my struggles to love are not over. I know your struggles to find ways to love these people are not over either.

We all need to take a good look at ourselves to figure out how we can practice loving and accepting all people, until it just becomes a part of our nature. It is so easy to be sucked into responding to evil with evil, but Paul advised the people of the churches that they were to “…overcome evil with good”. To love all people is not easy, it’s downright hard, but worth it. People do change when others are nice to them, lets make this our goal, to pray for and do good towards those who we see who are racist, homophobic, and bigoted. Let us be the people we should be. And with that may all God’s children say Amen!