

2019 02 24 – Revolutionary Love

Luke 6:27-38

Jesus was standing out in the open on a flat plain. He had his twelve disciples at his side and he was surrounded by a huge crowd of people who had come from Judea, from Jerusalem and even from the coast of the Mediterranean. They had come to hear him and to be healed by him. Jesus was preaching to this great multitude when he said,

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

Love your enemies. This has to be one of the most difficult commands that we receive as followers of Jesus. Our enemies are people who actively oppose us or are hostile to us; they are people who want to hurt us. Our enemies are often people who hate us. Yet Jesus calls us to love them.

Think about someone in your life who has actively tried to hurt you or hurt a member of your family. Think about someone that has cursed you or abused you. Think about the actions that they have taken against you personally, or against people like you. If no one comes to mind then think about someone that you don't agree with, someone whose behaviour annoys you, someone who has given you a hard time, or someone who you find difficult to like.

What feelings are rising in you as you think about and possibly even picture in your mind this person who is an enemy, an abuser, an adversary, or an annoyance. What are you feeling? Name some of the emotions that are rising up in you. (*wait for answers – anger, rage, fear, frustration, helplessness*)

These are all normal feelings and they can be helpful, but Jesus is telling us that we also need to love them. So how do we do that?

This week I watched an amazing Ted Talk given by a woman named Valarie Kaur. Valarie is the founder of a movement called the Revolutionary Love Project. Today, I am going to share with you some of her ideas and also parts of her personal story. Let's begin at the beginning with a story from Valarie's childhood. <https://revolutionarylove.net/ted/> (4:00 min to 5:00 min)

"I see no stranger, I see no enemy. I choose to see all the faces I meet and wonder about them." Obviously Guru Nanak and Jesus had similar ideas about how we should view the other. Valarie's grandfather taught her to wonder about the other, to listen to their stories. I invite you now to wonder about the people that you have pictured in your mind. Ask yourself, "What is their story? How did they come to hate, to abuse, to hurt, to annoy? Who or what hurt them, first?" Like Guru Nanak, Jesus calls us to love and to wonder about, the other.

As we wonder, let's listen to another story...

<https://revolutionarylove.net/ted/> (5:48 min to 8:00 min)

At the age of 20, Valarie learned the power of story broadly shared. How stories can be used to turn strangers into sisters and brothers. So she spent the next 15

years with her law degree and her camera and she fought alongside others as an advocate for justice. For 15 years Valarie worked to make her nation and the world a better place, a safer place for everyone.

And then, a couple of years ago, Valarie gave birth to a son. She looked around at the world into which he was born and realized hate was everywhere, that right wing nationalist movements were on the rise around the globe and that they had even captured the presidency of the United States. She realized that the country she lived in was now an even more dangerous place for her son. She said, “Black people are still seen as criminal, brown people as illegal, queer and trans as immoral and indigenous people as savages... This failure to see “the other” as some mother’s child makes it easier for them to ban us, detain us, deport us, imprison us, sacrifice us for the illusion of security.” Valarie was discouraged and nearly ready to quit. So what did she do? Let’s listen.

<https://revolutionarylove.net/ted/> (10:57 min to 15:06 min)

Valarie asked, “Who have we not yet tried to love?” In order for change to happen in our world, we are called to go beyond all other emotions and through an act of will, we are called to reach out to those who would hurt us. We are called to love our enemy and to wonder about them and to use her words, “to tend the wound” – to try and understand their suffering. Those we would call our enemies are human, just like us. They hurt, just as we do.

What Valarie discovered, what Jesus and Guru Nanak, already knew, was that it’s not people that we need to change, so much as the systems that enslave and

corrupt us all. She recognized that when her previous work had been successful it was because her actions had not just focused on individual people, but had changed laws or policies. She could love the people while working to change the system. I invite you now to think about the people that you have been picturing and to wonder about the system, the rules, the policies that allowed them to be hurt and the system that allowed them to hurt you.

We know that there are systems that need to be changed. This is the reason why schools now have zero tolerance for bullies, why Swift Current has a Safe Places policy, why the UN wrote a Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, why laws are constantly changing. So what law or policy needs to change next?

Valarie also points out that Revolutionary Love is not just about loving the other and loving our enemy. The third, and probably the most important part of Revolutionary Love is loving ourselves. Jesus calls us to “love our neighbour as ourselves.” It is impossible to love the other or to love our enemy if we haven’t already learned to love and care for ourselves. Valarie pointed out that it took her 15 years to be able to reach out to her enemy. We need to give ourselves the time to feel and to heal.

When we are hurt, it is not helpful to suppress our rage. All our emotions are important. Valarie Kaur describes it this way:

Joy is the gift of love;
grief is the price of love; and
anger is the force that protects it.

We love ourselves when
we breathe through the fire of pain and
refuse to let it harden to hate.

Breathing through the fire of pain, healing from the hurt, can take hours, days, months or even years. We need to give ourselves the time we need to heal so that we can then reach out and help to heal the other, the enemy, the world.

The people around Jesus had come to hear him and to be healed by him. Jesus told them to love their enemies because he knew that the letting go of hate, was and is a crucial step in the healing process. May we all know the power of Revolutionary Love in our lives. May we all experience the joy that love brings: love for our friends and families, love for the other, love for our enemy, and love for ourselves.