

2020 10 25 – Loving our Neighbours

Matthew 22:34-46

This week every time I've turned on the radio, the TV, or even my computer, the headlines have always been the same. There have been two main topics:

1. the record number of daily COVID-19 cases in our own province, in the rest of Canada and around the world, and
2. elections in the U.S. and here at home.

These were the issues at the top of my mind when I read this week's reading from the gospel of Matthew. "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" the Pharisees asked, testing Jesus' knowledge of the Torah. And Jesus replied, "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 commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

These are familiar words for most of us, but we are reading them in an increasingly strange and unfamiliar time. We are living in the grip of fear and uncertainty. We are living in the midst of a pandemic. So the question for me is, "How do we love our neighbours in this time of COVID-19?" I put that question out onto the Internet this week and I found a Christian website called *World Renew* that divided their answer into five parts. So I decided to use their structure to think about my answer to this question.

<https://worldrenew.net/our-stories/5-ways-to-love-your-neighbor-during-covid-19>

How do we love our neighbours in this time of COVID-19?

Be Kind to the Elderly and the Immunocompromised

In this time we need to always be aware of those who are most likely to get seriously ill and even die from this coronavirus. I am aware that many of us fit into this category. I believe there are two important ways that we can love our elderly and immunocompromised neighbours. First, we wear our masks, we keep our distance, we stay in our bubble and we self-isolate and get tested as soon as symptoms appear. In other words, we do what our health authorities have been asking us to do for months. Second, we ask our neighbours what else they need. We ask them how we can assist them with their everyday tasks. We ask them how we can help them stay healthy and safe.

How do we love our neighbours in this time of COVID-19?

Be Kind to Healthcare Workers and others on the Frontline

As the number of cases continues to rise, one of the biggest concerns is our health care system's ability to cope. The best way we can love our neighbours on the frontlines of this pandemic is to follow the guidelines that I've already talked about. As the weather gets colder, many of our activities are moving indoors and the need for masks and physical distancing is increasing. Just this week I had two indoor funerals and, and both times I wore a mask through the entire worship service. It was a new experience for me, but one that I know will become the norm, at least for now. Yes, we should also support our frontline workers by expressing our gratitude, and asking how we can help; but our most important task is keeping ourselves and others healthy and safe.

How do we love our neighbours in this time of COVID-19?

Be Kind to Your Local Community

When the pandemic first arrived in Swift Current, a local group formed on Facebook called the Pandemic Support Network. They are still very active and continue to provide updates and answer questions about living in this time. This is just one example of people in this city who have stepped up to help.

Being kind to our local community is about recognizing both the human and the divine in every person who lives here. Sometimes it requires thinking outside the box and coming up with new and innovative solutions. Here's an example from Toronto, one of the current "hot spots" in our country. This story comes from a website called covidkindness.ca.

It's one thing to keep up with regular hand washing during a global pandemic when you live in a home with a sink; for anyone experiencing homelessness, it can be a very different story. As lockdowns came into effect across Canada, they reduced people's access to public washrooms in parks, libraries, and businesses, and things became even harder.

Joshua Kanakaratham, a 33 year-old engineer living in Toronto, saw an opportunity to do some good for his community. Using the crowdfunding platform [GoFundMe](https://www.gofundme.com), [he] raised over \$2,000 and launched [CleanHandsTO](https://www.cleanhandsto.com). Inspired by the Atlanta non-profit *Love Beyond Walls*, the group used the donated funds to purchase and install hand washing stations at locations across Toronto to help ensure those experiencing homelessness are able to keep up with regular hand washing.

<https://covidkindness.ca/news/volunteers-installed-hand-washing-stations-around-toronto-for-those-experiencing-homelessness/>

As individuals we may not be able to come up with these kinds of solutions on our own. But we can look for people and organizations who are already doing the work and support them in their cause.

One of those organizations is, of course, First United Church. During this pandemic all of our committees have continued to do their ministry often in new and innovative ways. Our building is now open and we are, once again, making our facilities available to community organizations, including being a polling station for our provincial election. One of the ways each of us can love our neighbour is by supporting the ministry and mission of our own congregation.

Another way to be kind to our community is to participate in the political process. We live in a democracy and have the gift of being able to vote. This year, as you cast your ballot, I invite you to ask yourself, “Does this choice that I am making reflect Jesus’ commandment to love my neighbour as myself?”

How do we love our neighbours in this time of COVID-19? *(next screen)*

Be Kind to the World

It is hard living in the midst of a pandemic here in Swift Current, SK; but we all know that compared to many in the world we live a privileged existence. Loving our neighbours goes well beyond our city, our province or even our country. I was very proud of our Church Council this summer when they agreed to give \$5,000 from our Planned Giving Fund to the United Church COVID-19 Global

Response Appeal and another \$3,000 to the United Church's appeal for the people of Lebanon. Even in difficult times, it is important that we recognize those in need beyond our borders.

How do we love our neighbours in this time of COVID-19? *(next screen)*

Be Kind to Yourself

On the website this was first on the list and that's where it should remain. Jesus made it clear, "love your neighbour as yourself," not instead of yourself. In this time of COVID-19 it is especially important that we create space for our own physical, emotional and spiritual health. I have noticed that my need for self-care has increased during this time. These days, working a regular 40-hour week, feels more like 50 hours and 50 hour weeks (like the ones I've been working this month) feel more like 60. The extra stress and anxiety are definitely taking a toll on all of us. So take some time to relax, eat good food, reach out and connect by video or phone, go for a walk, spend time in nature and when it is safe, take your mask off, and let the sun and the wind touch your face. Do what you need to do to stay healthy.

Let us love ourselves so that we can continue loving our neighbours.