Love Cares Beyond Itself

# First in a Lent/Easter 2017 series: Jesus Speaks to Our Times

# Scripture: Luke 18:31-19:10

# Key thought: Jesus demonstrated four basic skills of caring:

# Intro:

## Jesus had much on his mind at the time of this text

First of all, Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem for the final time and he knew it. Jesus knew that at Jerusalem he was going to be killed. The tension between him and the Pharisees and Sadducees that had been building over the years would come to a head. In addition to this, as Jesus tried to forewarn his disciples and explain what was going to happen, they didn’t get it. Here are his closest friends, his chosen successors whom he has hand-picked and spent all his time training, and they don’t get the most essential lesson, what is going to happen to him at the end. So Jesus could not be blamed if he were very preoccupied at this point in his life. Any of us certainly would’ve been.

## Instead Jesus gives us a high example of love

Now when I am preoccupied, I tend to be a little brusque. I am overly sensitive to interruptions. And I’m more focused on my own agenda. Maybe it’s just me, but I think not. I think that’s just the way we are as humans. Unfortunately, it becomes a habit with us and we’re not just that way when we’re preoccupied. We become focused on our agenda pretty much most of the time. And this in spite of the fact that we don’t necessarily like this about ourselves.

It’s also been one of the difficult things about this political season—seeing people so focused on themselves. But I learned in psychology class a long time ago that when we don’t like something about another person, there’s a good chance that the reason that it bugs us is probably because that same thing is an issue for us in our own personality and it bugs us about ourselves. We hate to admit it but all of us have our own issues with getting self-focused way too much.

So I want us to look this morning at this passage because here Jesus sends us to school on what it really means to love at a time when it would be very easy not to. Nobody would’ve blamed Jesus for having too much on his mind to pay much attention to other people’s business on that particular day. But that was not Jesus. Jesus, on that day like every other day, exemplified the love of the heavenly Father for us. He exemplified the kind of love that he wants us to show to other people. I find in this passage four key skills that we can learn from Jesus about how to be loving. Putting these four key skills into practice will help us to put love into action even on difficult days and in less than ideal circumstances when it would be much easier not to. What are the four skills that Jesus can teach us on this tough day in his own life?

# Skill one: listening

## Our lack of listening

Every day we are accosted by so much noise that we develop the skill of shutting out that which we don’t want to hear. Unfortunately, this sometimes means shutting people out too. That is one way that we don’t listen to others. Another way that we don’t listen is when we pretend to hear, but don’t really. We’re really occupied with our own thoughts and don’t allow our mind to actually think about what the other person is saying beyond giving some kind of grunt, to let them know that the soundwaves registered on our eardrums. Neither one of these kind of responses shows love. In addition, frequently we just plain miss what is actually going on because we are not listening between the lines, actively listening.

To answer before listening— that is folly and shame. Prov 18:13

## Jesus’ example of listening

Jesus response contrasts to ours. One of the first skills of love that Jesus demonstrated in the passage we read was listening. He heard the blind beggar. Now I suppose you have to say that the other two are with him heard the sound also, but they did not hear any more than that. But Jesus heard the cry of the heart and understood the need. He really listened.

My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry. James 1:19

I think of other times when Jesus listened.

I think about when Jesus was on the cross being crucified between two thieves. Certainly he could not have been blamed for shutting out the babble of the men beside him and focusing on his own grief and on his heavenly Father. On one side a thief reviled him. On the other side a thief said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:42-43). Even on the cross, while he was dying Jesus took time to listen and extend love.

## We need to learn to listen

What a far cry from Jesus’ example we are when we are totally caught up in our own agendas and won’t even listen to each other. God forgive us.

Listening is more than politely waiting for your turn to speak. It is more than hearing words. Real listening is receiving and accepting the message as it is sent – seeking to understand what the other person really means. When this happens you can go further than saying, "I hear you." You can say, "I hear what you mean."

Listening means taking time to know what the situation is before jumping to conclusions. …to be sure, listening takes effort but at the same time it frees us from ourselves and from our own interests and makes it possible for us to take in what the other person has to say. (H. Norman Wright in Communication: Key to Your Marriage p. 55, 61)

One person who commented on the political dialogue of the past two years said that what is missing is listening. Right and left do not actually listen to each other. They just shout louder. That is a folly Proverbs would tell us. Perhaps one Christian gift we can give to either side of the political spectrum is to really listen to the other side—not just to the rhetoric, but to the fears and concerns under it, to give the other side credit for their most positive motivations, to understand their context. What a gift of love that would be in the political arena!

# Skill two: empathy

## Empathy is learned

The second skill of love that Jesus showed even on this difficult day in his life, which we are often missing is empathy.

I think we are living in selfish times. I'm the first one to say that I'm the most selfish. We live in the so-called 'first world,' and we may be first in a lot of things like technology, but we are behind in empathy. Javier Bardem <https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/j/javierbard414227.html?src=t_empathy>

Here’s another quality that has been missing in the political theater. By nature, we as humans are not the best at empathy. God has made us with the capacity for it, but empathy is learned just as we learn to love. It begins with how we teach children. But if children grow up spoiled, they will have a low capacity for empathy. They have not been taught to think of the other person’s needs.

We have to teach empathy as we do literacy. Bill Drayton <https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/b/billdrayto542701.html?src=t_empathy>

Empathy comes through human experience. Our own pain becomes the basis for empathy with the pain of others. But where we have no experience, we can lack empathy.

Normal people have an incredible lack of empathy. They have good emotional empathy, but they don't have much empathy for the autistic kid who is screaming at the baseball game because he can't stand the sensory overload. Or the autistic kid having a meltdown in the school cafeteria because there's too much stimulation. Temple Grandin <https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/t/templegran451384.html?src=t_empathy>

## Jesus showed empathy to the blind and to Zacchaeus in this passage

But Jesus wasn’t like that. He could reach out to others in love in the most unique situations. In our text, Jesus sensed the desperation of the blind beggars whose lives were so limited by their lack of sight. In the case of Zacchaeus, Jesus sensed something deeper about this short little tax collector lying in the branches of the sycamore tree. Most people were ignoring him because he was a persona-non-gratis. Tax collectors were hated. They were looked upon as traitors because they were cooperating with the Roman government. But Jesus sensed in Zacchaeus a man filled with spiritual desire, in spite of his profession. Jesus sensed a man perhaps a little embarrassed by his shortness. Jesus sensed a man handicapped by his social isolation. Jesus showed him empathy.

## Showing empathy is showing love

Our natural selfishness handicaps us. Our lack of human experience hinders us. This is why we need to look to Jesus to learn the skills of love. Our natural self-focus means that we read into others’ behavior what we think rather than trying to look at it from their point of view. One of the basic growing spots in our ethical maturity is when we can begin to think about things from the other person’s point of view. Best-selling author Stephen Covey wrote:

When you show deep empathy toward others, their defensive energy goes down, and positive energy replaces it. That's when you can get more creative in solving problems. Stephen Covey <https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/s/stephencov636538.html?src=t_empathy>

# Skill three: impartiality

## We decry the increase of prejudice in our country

One of the things that we decry about the current situation in our country is the increased visibility of racism. This sad reality was illustrated just this week in our own area. Some unwise students at Canton high school made news by using Trump’s name as a taunt against an inner-city school at a basketball game, embarrassing their own team, and bringing charges of racism from many. I also learned recently that there was racist graffiti found at Granby high school, though I do not know the details. Anti-Semitism has reared its ugly head in our area recently as well with multiple called-in bomb threats to Hebrew schools and organizations in Connecticut and other parts of the country. Such behavior is absolutely despicable. Absolutely terrible! But why is it unacceptable? Bottom line – because they all are gross violations of the law of love! The law of love demands impartiality.

## Jesus showed that real love is without partiality

Consider this admonition from the book of James.

The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. James 3:17 NRSV

So heavenly wisdom, godly behavior, is characterized by impartiality in our treatment of people.

In this passage we are studying today, once again Jesus shows us the way by his perfect example. On his way to the cross he is completely impartial in his showing of love. He shows love to blind beggars beside the road, and to a rich tax collector. They were on opposite ends of the wealth spectrum but they were alike social outcasts. In the first incident, that of the beggars, Jesus was praised for his healing and his act of kindness by those around. For the second incident, Jesus was abused verbally, by those who saw him go to Zacchaeus’ house for dinner. They admonished him (I’m paraphrasing), “How can you go to such a sinner’s house, a tax collector no less, for dinner?” (See Luke 19:7)

Consider again the words of James.

If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. James 2:8,9 ESV

## Jesus taught impartial love too

Of course, we cannot help but remember also Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan. Jesus chose the Samaritan as the hero of the story intentionally. Samaritans were considered by the Jews of that time to be people of another race. Though they lived in between the area surrounding Jerusalem and the northern part of Israel where Jesus grew up, they were considered foreigners. Several hundred years before, Jewish people of the Samaritan area had intermarried with forced Assyrian immigrants. Ever after that the Jews considered them people of another race. So the Samaritans were despised by the Jews. They were shunned. They were avoided. But Jesus chose the Samaritan as the hero of his story intentionally, to help the Jews of his day and us to see that real love is impartial. It does not hold back for reasons of race, or social status, or wealth, or handicap or age. Love does not ask for a pedigree before it opens its heart and reaches out a hand to help. That’s the way Christians need to be today, whichever way the political wind blows.

# Skill four: action

## Love demands action

The fourth skill of love is taking action. Love cannot remain just an attitude or a feeling or a cluster of nice words. Love is only really love when it moves us to do something to show how we feel.

Let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. 1 John 3:18 NRSV

Jesus took action. He called the blind man to him and healed him. He invited himself to Zacchaeus’ house for dinner and there instructed him in the way of eternal life.

## We like to talk big

Today we talk about our love for the poor and our racial impartiality. But what action do we take? Are we sharing our wealth through organizations that are on the front lines helping the less fortunate around the globe? Are we speaking up and using our influence to advocate in favor of those oppressed or in need? Even better, are we volunteering our time and talents in ministries that help others? Love without action is empty. Love in action fulfills God’s commands and fills our own hearts with joy.

## True stories of love in action

### Love in action can be pretty mundane

Sometimes the call to put love in action is pretty mundane, to the point of being humbling as in this first person story I read in the Daily Bread.

“Do you have a few items you’d like me to wash?” I asked a visitor to our home in London. His face lit up, and as his daughter walked by, he said, “Get your dirty clothes—Amy’s doing our laundry!” I smiled, realizing that my offer had been extended from a few items to a few loads.

Later as I hung clothes outside on the line, a phrase from my morning’s Bible reading floated through my mind: “In humility value others above yourselves” (Phil. 2:3). I had been reading Paul’s letter to the people of Philippi, in which he exhorts them to live worthy of Christ’s calling through serving and being united with others. … We might claim to love others without selfish ambition or vain conceit, but the true state of our hearts isn’t revealed until we put our love into action. Though I felt tempted to grumble, I knew that as a follower of Christ, my call was to put my love for my friends into practice—with a clean heart.

### Love in action can be absolutely life-altering

Other times the call to love completely alters to trajectory of our lives. Here’s another first person story from another devotional booklet called Our Daily Journey.

Heather is a graduate from Yale University who lives in a trailer park in a rural part of the US. Why not take a big job in a big city? Well, it’s not because she’s fallen on hard economic times.

She lives there by choice.

Heather could have landed a lucrative job that afforded her a comfortable life in a dream home. Instead, her mission is to help some of the most vulnerable get out of poverty. Together with other members of her church and community, Heather offers friendship, mentoring, morning prayer times, and a reliable car that starts. To Heather, those entrenched in poverty aren’t statistics; they’re real people with first and last names. When she looks at the poor, she sees their strengths and their potential where others might only see failure and insurmountable odds.

Why does she do this? Heather is a follower of Jesus who believes she’s been called to shape her life after her Savior and Lord, particularly through service to those who haven’t enjoyed the same comforts, resources, and privileges she has.

Heather’s humble service to those in poverty reminds me of a profound question once posed by another follower of Jesus. After exhorting his readers to live a life of sacrifice modeled by Jesus ([1 John 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/nlt/1%20John%203.16)), John asked, “If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion—how can God’s love be in that person?” ([1 John 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/nlt/1%20John%203.17)).

Following Jesus isn’t only costly and uncomfortable, but it can also look crazy to a world that lives out a different set of values. May we reach out to help those in need today—participating with God in His saving and restoring work in our broken world ([1 John 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/nlt/1%20John%203.18)).

# Concluding Question

How is God asking you to put love into action today? In an increasing polarized world, follow Jesus and be different in order to make a difference! Actively listen; empathize; love impartially; and put your love into action.