

Sermon Note: Lavish Love

Fourth Sunday of Easter

Introduction

As we continue our post-Easter series *Reckless Love*, we turn to Psalm 103 and Luke 6. The psalmist remembers a God who forgives, heals, redeems, and crowns with steadfast love. God does all of this, the psalmist says, because “he knows how we were made; he remembers that we are dust.” Jesus tells his disciples to love their enemies, give without expecting anything back, and be merciful as God is merciful. This goes well past the point where most of us would stop.

Bishop Tom Berlin calls this “lavish love.” His book, *Reckless Love*, continues to be our companion guide as we explore what it means to receive that kind of love from God and to practice it with each other.

Illustration Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5UZOBbRAjXs>

In this clip from Pay It Forward (2000), a boy presents his plan to change the world to his seventh-grade class.

Why This Video?

Trevor’s classmates hear his idea and start poking holes in it. They call it unrealistic, and they’re not entirely wrong; there’s no guarantee any of it will work. But while the classroom is busy deciding whether generosity on this scale is possible, Trevor’s mom is offering a cup of coffee to a man she doesn’t know and likely doesn’t even trust.

Video Discussion Questions

1. Trevor’s classmates call his idea stupid and say people will blow off the honor system. What is it about generosity without a guaranteed return that makes people uncomfortable?
2. Mr. Simonet tells Trevor the class thinks his idea is “overly utopian.” Trevor’s response is a single word: “So?” What do you hear in that response?
3. When Mr. Simonet asks what put this idea in his head, Trevor begins, “Because…” and the scene cuts to Jerry finishing the thought: “...everything sucks.” Trevor’s assessment of the world is blunt. What does it tell you that his response to that assessment is generosity and not resignation?
4. Jerry offers to stop talking to Trevor, expecting Arlene to shut the whole thing down. Instead, she says no and offers him a cup of coffee. What is happening in that moment?
5. Arlene’s offer is small, just a cup of coffee. But it’s also immediate and unrehearsed. Think of a time when a small, ordinary gesture from someone meant more than you expected. What do you think made it mean more?
6. Trevor’s idea is designed to multiply. Three people become nine, become twenty-seven. But the first move is always one person doing one thing. What keeps most of us from making that first move?
7. The classroom debates whether this kind of love is realistic while Arlene is showing what it looks like. Where in your own life have you seen generosity happen in unexpected ways?

Psalm 103:1–14 (NRSVue)

¹Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and all that is within me,
bless his holy name.

²Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and do not forget all his benefits—
³who forgives all your iniquity,
who heals all your diseases,
⁴who redeems your life from the Pit,
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
⁵who satisfies you with good as long as you live
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.
⁶The Lord works vindication
and justice for all who are oppressed.
⁷He made known his ways to Moses,
his acts to the people of Israel.
⁸The Lord is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
⁹He will not always accuse,
nor will he keep his anger forever.
¹⁰He does not deal with us according to our sins
nor repay us according to our iniquities.
¹¹For as the heavens are high above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;
¹²as far as the east is from the west,
so far he removes our transgressions from us.
¹³As a father has compassion for his children,
so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him.
¹⁴For he knows how we were made;
he remembers that we are dust.

Luke 6:27–38 (NRSVue)

²⁷“But I say to you who are listening: Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you;
²⁸bles those who curse you; pray for those who mistreat you. ²⁹If anyone strikes you on the
cheek, offer the other also, and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even
your shirt. ³⁰Give to everyone who asks of you, and if anyone takes away what is yours, do
not ask for it back again. ³¹Do to others as you would have them do to you.

³²“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who
love them. ³³If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For
even sinners do the same. ³⁴If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive payment,
what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. ³⁵Instead,
love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be
great, and you will be children of the Most High, for he himself is kind to the ungrateful and
the wicked. ³⁶Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

³⁷“Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be
condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; ³⁸give, and it will be given to you. A good
measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap, for the
measure you give will be the measure you get back.”

Scripture Study Questions

1. The psalmist lists God's "benefits"—forgiveness, healing, redemption, steadfast love (verses 2–5). When you observe your own life, which of these benefits can you identify? What happens when you can't?
2. One of Psalm 103's most important words is *hesed*—steadfast, constant love (verse 8). The psalmist says God "does not deal with us according to our sins" (verse 10). What does that tell you about what motivates God's love? How does that compare to the way we tend to love?
3. "He knows how we were made; he remembers that we are dust" (verse 14). What does it mean that God's compassion is rooted in knowing exactly what we are? How does that knowledge change the way you receive God's love?
4. Jesus addresses the Sermon on the Plain to his disciples, the people already following him (verse 20). What does it tell you that the ones who have already said yes to Jesus are the ones who need to hear this teaching about love?
5. Jesus offers a series of practical examples: turn the other cheek, give your shirt, lend expecting nothing back. How do these examples go beyond what most of us would consider reasonable? What makes this kind of love "lavish" rather than foolish?
6. "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over" (verse 38). Most of us tend to dispense love carefully, measuring the cost before we give. Where do you see that kind of precision in your own life? What would it look like to let go of it?
7. Which of Jesus' practical examples of love do you find most difficult to live out? What makes it hard?

Weekly Action

Last week's message was titled, "Expand the Circle." As a reminder to expand the circle, write the letter **E** on a post-it note and add it next to your **B** from the first week. Each week of this series we'll add a letter to help us live out these commandments.

This week, set aside a few minutes each day to watch and listen for signs of love in unexpected places. It might be a stranger holding a door, a coworker checking in on someone who's been quiet, or a moment of patience in a conversation that could have gone sideways. Write down what you notice on a notepad or in a note app on your phone/computer. At the end of the week, look back at your list and pray. Ask God to help you look for small acts of love, and to show you where your own expressions of love might grow.

Prayer

Compassionate God, we can love only because you have first loved us. When we find your call to love each other challenging, and when we are tempted to yield to stirrings of anger and hate in our hearts, may your Spirit again bring us back to the love of Christ, where we see how greatly we have been forgiven and loved, and so how greatly we must forgive and love. Amen.

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