

Living it out (Application):

- Think of stories that you've heard, where someone has refused to tread the path of retribution and revenge, and has rather followed the way of generosity and grace.

Here's an example:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-27883685>

- Can you think of a way in which you can bless those who 'curse' you? How can you show kindness to someone who doesn't deserve it?

- Pray for those who ill-treat you, and lift to God those who you know who are finding life difficult because of the way in which they have been ill-treated by others.

Study

'We love because he first loved us'. Spend time reading through and meditating on 1John 14:15-21. How do this passage and Luke 6:27-38 relate?



A Prayer of St Francis of Assisi

Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace,
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.
O Divine Master,
grant that I may not so much seek to be
consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved, as to love;
for it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying
that we are born to eternal life. **Amen**

Mission Partner Prayer Focus:

This month we are praying for **Paul and Ruth Turner in Peru. Pray for the team going out to Peru next month to join them from St Mark's – that God would do amazing things in and through them. Pray that they would know God's rich blessings**



St Mark's

Inspiring each other to
love and follow Jesus Christ...
everywhere in everything

Welcome and worship:

Read Psalm 103 and give thanks to the Lord for his generous love. Reflect on those things that you are grateful for – lift up your praise and worship.

LUKE 6:27-38 - LOVING THOSE WHO DON'T LOVE YOU

In 1996, the Ku Klux Klan, the white supremacist organization, held a rally in Ann Arbor, Michigan. In protest to the presence of the racist organization in what was a progressive and multicultural town, a group of anti-KKK demonstrators gathered by their hundreds to voice their opposition. Amongst the crowd of demonstrators was an 18-year-old black teenager called Keshia Thomas.

While the protesters were separated from the Klansmen by a security fence, the crowd suddenly became agitated when a woman with a megaphone shouted, "There's a Klansman in the crowd." They turned around to see a white, middle-aged man wearing a Confederate flag T-shirt. Although he tried to walk away from them, the protesters followed to make their feelings known.

It was unclear whether the man was a Klansman, but to the anti-KKK protesters, the Confederate flag T-shirt that he was wearing and the SS tattoo on his arm represented the hatred and division that they opposed.

Someone in the crowd shouted "Kill the Nazi" and the man began to run away. As he tried to flee he was knocked to the ground. A mob surrounded him, kicking him and hitting him with their placards.

Looking on in horror, Keshia Thomas realized that mob mentality had taken over and that she had to do something.

Without regard for her own safety, the 18-year-old high school student threw herself on top of the man and shielded him from those who were attacking him.

"It became barbaric," she remembers, "When people are in a crowd they are more likely to do things they would never do as an individual. Someone had to step out of the pack and say, 'This isn't right.' When they dropped him to the ground, it felt like two angels had lifted my body up and laid me down."

A student photographer called Mark Brunner documented the extraordinary event.

INDIVIDUAL STUDY NOTES

Week beginning: 22nd June 2014

Our next Whole Church Prayer Meeting
will be on Wednesday 9th July at
7.30pm, followed by a Home Group
Leader's Meeting at 8.30pm.

Brunner was astounded by Keshia Thomas' courage: "She put herself at physical risk to protect someone who, in my opinion, would not have done the same for her. Who does that in this world?"

Two significant factors were at the heart of Keshia Thomas' act of gracious love – her faith, and her own experiences of discrimination and violence:

"I knew what it was like to be hurt. The many times that that happened, I wish someone would have stood up for me... For the most part, people who hurt... they come from hurt. It is a cycle. Let's say they had killed him or hurt him really bad. How does the son feel? Does he carry on the violence?"

Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who ill-treat you. Do to others as you would have them do to you.

Keshia Thomas' courageous act beautifully encapsulates something of the message that Jesus is proclaiming. Jesus is announcing a radical new way of living – a kingdom that turns the world on its head. We are being called to lavishly pour out love on those who haven't earned it, who don't deserve it – to be people who live out of outrageous, extravagant, overflowing generosity.

How often do we hear ourselves justifying our actions or seeking reassurance for how we've responded to other people – 'They deserved it', 'They should have known not to treat me like that', 'It's not like they were nice to me', 'It's their responsibility, not mine'. We so easily revert to this way of measuring how we'll treat other people by how they treat us - of mentally keeping note of whether they've done enough to earn our attention, action or love.

What credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them.

Jesus is calling us to a new way – a way that doesn't dictate our response by the points or tokens that people have built up to merit our love, where we don't wait to be in someone's debt before we respond to them.

This only makes sense when we know that we are truly and utterly loved, even before we've had opportunity to be love-ly. We haven't, and we can't, earn God's love for us. To quote those famous words of Phillip Yancey, 'There is nothing we can do to make God love us more and there is nothing we can do to make God love us less.' Mercifully, God's love is not dependent on whether we've earned it - ***He is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.*** And it's only in the knowledge and experience of this outrageous, extravagant, overflowing love that we can truly love those who don't love us. It's only when we are aware of just how merciful, compassion and kind our Father is to us that we can respond out of those riches.

I'm sure for some people, when we start to speak of loving your enemy, someone will instantly come to mind. For others, you might be thinking 'I'm not sure I really have anyone I'd go so far as to call an 'enemy''.

In films and TV programmes, especially superhero cartoons, it's usually patently clear who the baddies are. We can quickly work out who the enemy is supposed to be – it will be obvious from how they look, what they wear, how they talk and so on.

But it's unlikely in our lives that our detractors will be wearing a black cloak, or will have a green face, or red eyes. Opposition might come in far more subtle ways, and it's important to recognize that though we may not be able to identify our out and out nemesis, the call to love those who don't love us is just as pertinent.

A person pushes past you at the supermarket check-out.

A colleague at work constantly undermines you.

Somebody steals the parking space that you've been waiting for.

A friend borrows a book and doesn't return it.

How will we respond?

By raising our voice and asserting our rights?

By giving them a dose of their own medicine?

By shaking a fist or raising our middle finger?

By harbouring resentment?

Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who ill-treat you. Do to others as you would have them do to you.

It goes without saying that this is not easy. Our first response is so often to think how quickly we can get back at people, and even things up.

Jesus is calling us to a far more freeing and beautiful way – the way of self giving, sacrificial love. He would come to know exactly what it would mean to have somebody slap him on the cheek, take his coat and his shirt, take everything that belonged to him. Even as he lay down his life his cry was forgiveness. He was ill-treated and cursed. But his kingdom was bigger than hate. Sacrifice overcame violence. Love was stronger than death.

You are being called to a way that can change the world, that will turn everything on its head. So let's get creative:

What can we do to others that we'd love them do to us?

Where can we surprise those who make life difficult for us and belittle us, with acts of grace and kindness?

How will we lavish outrageous, extravagant, overflowing generosity on those who don't deserve it?

Over to you.