



## LESSONS for LIFE

**APRIL 5, 2009 11:00 a.m. PALM SUNDAY**  
**8 LIFE CHANGING LESSONS FROM JESUS:**  
**FROM RESENTMENT TO LOVE**  
**Rev. Dr. Brent Hawkes, C.M.**

### SACRED READINGS

**Lesson: MATTHEW 22: 34 - 40**

**Gospel: Selections from LUKE 10: 25 – 28; 29 - 37**

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I want to thank Douglas Elliott for playing the role of the lawyer this morning. I didn't know whether it was easier for Douglas to play the lawyer or for me to play Jesus, but we both enjoyed doing that this morning. So imagine the road from Jerusalem down to Jericho – a road just a little under 20 miles long and yet the elevation during that 20 miles falls about thirty-six hundred feet. For centuries and centuries it was thought to be a dangerous road in terms of the terrain but also known to be a very dangerous road because of robbers. Indeed, in the first century Josephus wrote of the dangers of traveling alone. In the fifth century Jerome wrote about the dangers of the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. In the eighteen hundreds you had to pay a fee for an escort to be able to go with you to protect you along the way. In 1930 H.V. Morton wrote that even when traveling by car you were warned not travel the route at night because you'd likely be stopped and robbed along the way. I use those examples to show you how clearly the message would have been when Jesus talked about the man who went from Jerusalem to Jericho and how he was robbed. Immediately people would have said, "What a stupid thing for him to do. He should have known better than to travel that route by himself." Who is your neighbour? Even the person who, out of their own stupidity, get themselves in trouble, make a mistake, they also are our neighbours. We cannot say, "You got yourself in trouble, now get yourself out of the mess." They are still our neighbours.

Along came a priest and noticed a man lying by the road. Now this priest, according to his religious tradition, if he had touched a dead body he would have been deemed to be unclean and he would have had to give up his place in worship for the next little while until enough time had passed that he would be deemed clean again; and he chose his religious rituals, his place of honour over caring for the individual. How often do we deem something below us and we pass by on the other side? Then along came a Levite, a member of the tribe of Levi. He looked down and saw the man there and he thought, "Ah, this is a group of robbers who are just pretending that this has happened and as soon as I go to care for the person they will rob me also." He chose his own personal safety over caring for someone in need. How often do we deem our own personal safety or comfort as a priority above caring for someone else? Then along came a Samaritan. Now Samaritans were one of two groups of people. Sometimes when they talk about Samaritans they mean a nationality, a people who lived next to the State of Israel and were foreigners; other times they talk of Samaritans as being the rule-breakers, the people outside of the norm, the people who don't quite fit in. Jesus was once called a Samaritan because he broke the rules. And so, if we think of that, of people outside the norm, the rule breakers who don't quite fit in, many of us could label ourselves or be labeled Samaritans. This Samaritan was moved by pity and he bent down and he cared for the person, took him to an inn and he gave some money for the man to be cared for and he said to the inn keeper, "Spend whatever you need to care for him and I will pay you back the next time I come by." And so obviously the Samaritan was well known by the inn keeper, well enough known by the inn keeper that he trusted him with these financial



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dealings. So where does this little story of the good Samaritan come from? It comes from a wider story that Jesus was teaching about love; and teaching about the importance of moving away from resentment and moving into love. Love your neighbour, love yourself and love God with all of your heart and your mind and your soul and your strength; and out of the story about love came the question of who is my neighbour? And this is where the story of the good Samaritan comes from.

So this morning I want to challenge us to live our lives in love. The first reading that Bruce read said, *Love your neighbour as you love yourself and love God*; and then Jesus said, *All of the law of the prophets must rest on these three*; so all of the rules and the regulations you make for your life, how you live your life based on loving yourself, loving your neighbour and loving God. Now I have a question for you: I want you to think of the city of Toronto and I'm going to ask for two or three names to be yelled out in just a moment. What street do you think – in the city of Toronto – the largest number of people live on? (Answers were voiced from various congregants): Yonge Street, Bloor Street, Jane Street – and someone earlier said Bathurst Street. Well, (said Brent), you're all wrong. The street that most people live on in the city of Toronto is called "Resentment Road." (laughter) Most people have bought real estate there or, if they're of a certain generation or type, they've moved their RVs there and parked them. Resentment Road. Most of us live our lives not based on loving self, loving God and loving our neighbour. Most of us live our lives from resentment to resentment to resentment. We have parked ourselves there and are very comfortable there, thank you. Now the view from Resentment Road is not great. From that perspective you don't see a lot of the goodness, the good scenery, the good viewpoint, and I visited there this week. John and I had a little disagreement – and I got his permission to say this – John was at an art class and he was going out afterwards with some friends and I said, "Hey, I'd like to join you. Just give me a call when you're done." Now one of the things I hate is waiting! So, I was at home – waiting – and waiting – and waiting for the phone call and it finally came and I was furious because a lot of time had passed and so John said, "Come on out and join us," and I said, "I'll think about it." So I spent some time parked on Resentment Road – and I quite enjoyed it, frankly, and then I remembered the sermon I was to preach this Sunday. So I thought, I need to get out of this and go out and have some fun – go out and see John and meet some of his friends – but I was in this struggle because I was quite comfortable being resentful. I was quite looking forward to telling John how upset I was. And then I finally said to myself, this is stupid. I will continue to be resentful. You know, if I asked you the question this morning, *How many of you have a voodoo doll at home with pins that you're thinking about in terms of who you want to stick these pins into?* I imagine very few of you would raise your hands, but the reality is that every one of you has one and it looks exactly like you and when someone sticks a pin in you that's one thing but what happens is you take that pin and you stick in another pin and another pin and the more I sat there perturbed at John I kept sticking more pins in! He stuck one in but I stuck in about ten more pins because of my resentment.

If we are to be followers of the one called Jesus we are challenged to give up our property on Resentment Road and when another real estate agent comes to you and tries to sell you a house there, refuse it. Don't move back to Resentment Road. If you are to live your life based on love and not resentment then the first step is to accept responsibility for where you are. Catch yourself in that moment when you're in Resentment Road and realize that that's not where you're supposed to live. Accept responsibility; move out of resentment; forgive yourself, forgive your neighbour; forgive God. Jesus said that we're to live our lives in love – starting with loving ourselves. Now he said, *Love your neighbour as you love yourself*. Now this morning I'm going to ask you – please break that commandment. Please, some of you, do not live out that commandment. I do not want you to love me the way you are loving yourself because many of us do not practise loving ourselves. We need to begin



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by loving ourselves; loving our bodies by how we care for the bodies we are given and stop putting poison into our bodies. Many of us are eating things that are unhealthy for us, loving ourselves financially, caring for ourselves financially and not putting ourselves into a financial situation that's going to cause turmoil and difficulty for ourselves; being responsible, practicing safer sex; knowing more about how to care for ourselves and others around us; taking time to rest and renew; time for you; time to be with friends; build relationships, loving yourself; reaching out when you need help; loving yourself enough to say help to someone nearby; loving yourself and loving your neighbour. Who is your neighbour? The person in need, that person is your neighbour. And how are you to love your neighbour?

I want to talk this morning about the number one way most of the people in this room practise loving your neighbour: through the paying of your taxes; the taking of some of your resources and putting those resources together in a pool and from that pool care is given to others. That is a caring, wonderful way of loving our neighbour. I'd like you to re-think your attitude toward paying your taxes and instead of resenting that someone is taking it away from you see it as a way to love your neighbour, caring for others. Other ways you love your neighbours is by volunteering, by reaching out, by watching, by listening for needs, by responding to those needs around you. Love yourself, love your neighbour and love God.

Now I want to clear up a misconception here. God doesn't need your love. Somehow in Christianity, maybe in other religions too, but certainly in Christianity, we have created this jealous, angry, needy God that somehow needs our love or needs our worship. God doesn't need our love. We need to love God; we need to love the holy; we need to love the creativity and the healing and the justice and the peace making. We need to love God with our whole being because in loving God we open ourselves up to be the best that we can be for each other. Loving God is something we need to do for ourselves and for others around us. Living our lives in love; loving self, loving God and loving your neighbour in a wonderful balance. Not loving ourselves so much we're forgetting everything else; not loving everybody else so much that we're losing our lives, sacrificing ourselves and forgetting to take time for ourselves; and not taking so much time loving God – you know someone once said that some people are so heavenly minded they're no earthly good – spending so much time thinking about the spiritual or the holy and spending little time thinking about others and concerns of our world – a wonderful balance of loving ourselves, loving our neighbour and loving God.

Love led Jesus to Jerusalem, not the praise. The Hallelujahs and the allelujahs mean a lot when we offer them or sing them. They can be unbelievably moving moments. Jesus let love take him to Jerusalem and I believe he knew what was going to happen. Love led Jesus to Jerusalem for the disciples and for you and for me. Where will love take you this week? Will love lead you to take some time off? Will love lead you to making yourself a priority? Will love lead you to reach out to someone else – maybe you thought someone below your station; maybe will cause you to risk something this week. Where will love lead you this week? My prayer is that it will lead you off Resentment Road; that you will decide not to live there any more; that you will base your life in love. Amen.