



LESSONS for LIFE

APRIL 5, 2009 7:00 p.m
8 LIFE CHANGING MESSAGES FROM JESUS
FROM RESENTMENT TO LOVE
Deacon Randi Williams

Our God is an awesome God. If you believe that tonight, say Amen. AMEN. *Our God is an awesome God!* If you believe that tonight, say Amen. AMEN. That sounds more like it. This morning Brent spoke with you and the world *From Resentment to Love* and he led into the aspect of resentment very gradually, very graciously. So tonight, do you want the not so good stuff first or the good good stuff first? Okay. I have a question for you and there's no need for you to raise your hands for those brave souls who said not so good. Who among us had never resented something or someone? Thank you. From our early years we feel some sense of resentment, sometimes in our family, for those who may be an older sibling and years later a younger sibling comes along and suddenly you realize you are not getting the attention that you used to get. I see some noddings, I see some smiles here. There's an element of resentment because something's happening in this family; the shift is no longer on you. Suddenly there's somebody who's taking your power, somebody who is interloping here. Then we resent the friend who didn't study as hard as we studied for that test but somehow got higher marks than us. Oh yes, I hear the Amen corner over there. And then, if you were brought up in Sunday School like I was and they gave prizes for those of you who really got to know your Bible verses – and we're all Baptist people here – and Pentecostal people and the other evangelicals – then you know that if you really studied hard on those Bible verses and you came second you weren't just angry, you resented the person who was ahead of you and managed to get the prize, which was usually a book. Brent, you got the prize? (Laughter). I wasn't sure if he got the prize or was resentful or what! We experience another type of resentment at work when someone gets a promotion that we feel they didn't deserve or we feel we should have gotten it instead; and opportunities for resentment seem to be around us every day and everywhere.

Resentment – what does it mean? It means to feel displeased and indignant about something; displeased and indignant. Resentment occurs very easily and in some cases it sneaks up unbeknown. It can either wrap us snugly or it can fire us up in a frenzied fit. It can build on small things that happen: someone didn't say hello to me, didn't acknowledge my presence; I didn't feel I was heard; he walked right past me without speaking and I know he saw me. How dare she? How could he? And sometimes it's just the silent stuff. We hear people say with all sorts of emotions, "I resent what she said. I resent how I was spoken to by him." Resentment is not an anger, although sometimes it comes out as anger. The problem of anger is this – that we're not allowed to get angry in a healthy way and before long, BOOM, it's resentment big time!

Quick story: Jesus in the temple casting out the money changers clearly signifies to me expressed anger. I don't think he did it out of resentment. You see, resentment goes deeper, far deeper than mere anger. Resentment is sometimes based on fear. It comes from a place of hurt; you have hurt me, I will harm you some way. It's a type of retaliation; it sets the ground for being vindictive. You hurt me for not being there for me. You hurt me by not supporting me. It's not anger, but anger is connected. What does resentment do to the other person? Probably not a lot. Most of us don't realize that people who we resent probably don't even know that we resent them; they don't know our feelings, they don't know how we're hurting inside and they don't even know we're giving them the silent treatment. What



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about us? It makes us sick. Physically we get high blood pressure, low blood pressure and blood pressure in between and everything else that goes with it. How do we leave that place of resentment and come to a place of love? You see, resentment reduces us; it makes us less than. When we resent we're really getting distressing ourselves, so how then do we keep ourselves built up? How do we leave that place of resentment and come to a place of love? Perhaps we should try to see the person for who they truly are. Have you ever heard of someone resenting someone they've never really met? Yes, absolutely, simply by word of mouth. When I was doing some quick research on the word resentment the words that kept cropping up as subjects were these: psychology, forgiveness, anger, self-esteem, emotions. Today is Palm Sunday, the day that we recall when Jesus rode triumphantly into Jerusalem, with crowds hailing him as a deliverer, a saviour, one who would save them from Roman dominance. I can well imagine people – probably not with palms like these – but they were waving them; they were exuberant. They wanted to make sure their voices were heard. They were shouting and when he didn't proclaim political victory there was some anger, some resentment. The same palms that were taken to praise him I somehow suspect they were dropped on the ground and stepped on, because they resented that Jesus did not do what he wanted them to do. And we get resentful when people don't do what we want them to do – what we feel they should do. I suspect that later on Judas also felt some sense of resentment and traded in Jesus. Okay, that's the not so good stuff.

Now for the good stuff. On the scene rides love. Matthew Elliott wrote the book *Feel, or Free the Power of Listening to Your Heart. God is concerned about the way we feel about things*, Elliott wrote. *God has created us to live with and through our emotions.* The true health of our spiritual lives is measured by how we feel. Our scripture today is taken from Luke 10, verses 25 to 37. On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher", he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "What is written in the law?" Jesus replied. "How do you read it?" He answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind and love your neighbour as yourself." "You have correctly answered," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live." But the lawyer wanted to justify to himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?" In reply Jesus said, "a man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road and when he saw the man he passed by on the other side. So too a Levite. When he came to the place he passed by on the other side; but a Samaritan, as he traveled came to where the man was and as he saw him he pitied him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine and then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the inn-keeper. Look after him, he said, and when I return I will reimburse you for any extra expense you might have. Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

The text today is one that plays an enormously important role in Christian communities. The story of the good, and some say the compassionate Samaritan. There is no question that over the years innumerable ministries have been inspired by what appears to be selflessness. I can almost guarantee that it didn't matter if one is well versed in things biblical or not everyone knows the story of the Good Samaritan. It resonates because it is important and morally it is extremely constructive. In essence this story saved a life way back then and continues to save lives today.



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The story, which is unique to Luke and not part of the synoptic tradition, might not have been told were it not for the first main player: the lawyer, the expert in the law, a scribe, or some of us might say a theologian, when he asked, "What should I do to inherit eternal life?" This is not a new question. Philosophers have looked at it. Theologians have looked at it. It's plagued humanities' mind for millennia and continues to do so in various forms. One of the most abstract personal questions we can wrestle with is about life.

How frustrating it is when someone to whom you've asked a question responds with a question. That's just what Jesus did. He asked the man, "What's written in the law?" and the response is, "You should love God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and your neighbour as yourself." The text could be called the law of love and if there's anyone here – and I do see some people here from the Thursday night class where we are studying the book of Deuteronomy - you will note that the answer is cited from the Shema, Deuteronomy 6:5 where the total love of God is combined with loving one's neighbour as yourself. Jesus commanded the man and told him to do that and he shall live. I can almost imagine the man scratching his head, thinking, *it can't be that simple*. I believe what Jesus is saying is that our relationship to God is what gives life and gives it abundantly. We were not only designed to love but we were designed to love well and the product of our love for God is not about righteous actions only but how we regard others, those who God has as our neighbours: the lawyer, one of whom may have been out to trap Jesus pushes the question further and responds with yet another question, "Who is my neighbour?" This is clearly an attempt to limit who could be one's neighbour. Have you ever had a friend who perhaps lives on the border of your community that may not be deemed by some very safe, or could be a little dangerous – and you ask that person where they live? Who's your neighbour? They always go to the side they deem to be the better side and they always discount the persons they deem to be the lesser ones. In our contemporary terms he'd be asking about the 'us' and the 'them.' Jesus' reply challenges that thought reminding us that each of us is a neighbour and our neighbours can come from pretty surprising places. He then launches into a parable, simply a story as a teaching tool. The elements were all very factually known to the people in that area. As we review the parable keep in mind that the Samaritan has become the good guy, only due to some good biblical public relations, but in the original setting a Samaritan would have been a notorious bad guy, so we already see Jesus – to coin a phrase – turning over some more tables. His response is plain. Just be a neighbour whenever and wherever.

This is the story:

1. A notoriously dangerous road from Jericho to Jerusalem, some seventeen miles or twenty-two kilometers.
2. There are lots of caves for bandits and thieves to hide in. Everybody knows that this is going on. Who would ever travel down this road knowing this is going on?
3. The victim – some would say he got what he deserved – is beaten and left for dead.
4. The priest, a potential source of help passes by on the other side. He has his reasons, some may be religious, some may be cultural and some may have been resentment toward the victim.

I think that this is a brilliant use of literary space, because Jesus says – and Jesus depicts the priest as moving as far away as possible – and we can add that in our resentment our resentment keeps us as far away from that person or that thing that really bugs us. We don't want to confront it; we just want to push it off to the side. We want to walk away from it as much as possible.



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Then follows a Levite, a lay associate of the priest, and the Levite does likewise. A part of me also once asked, "Hey, how come these guys were traveling by themselves and nothing happened to them?" but that's another story. And then an ironic twist of events: a Samaritan comes. Knowing the resentment that was held for these people the lawyer doubtlessly thought – this half-breed definitely won't help – but it is the despised man that Jesus uses to show pity, to rub salt in the wounds so to speak. Jesus not only makes him the hero but then elaborates on the six actions that were taken to save the wounded man and to make sure that he continues in health. I can just imagine Jesus smiling with glee; and you know, when I stopped to pause that I think if more of us stopped to envision Jesus smiling with glee that he's got somebody - maybe we'll lighten up a little bit. As he asked the scribe, "So, Bud, who of the three do you think is the neighbour to this victim?" The answer is obvious, but the lawyer daren't bring himself to even mention the name of Samaritan. Do you see what resentment can do? It can prevent us from seeing and speaking the good when it's right before us. So he replies, "The one who had mercy." Jesus didn't say, "Man, get over yourself and say the name," he simply said, "Go and do likewise." So, this well known parable reminds us too to love God and in loving God it's not just about living holy lives but how we authentically, how we wholesomely love ourselves first in a healthy way and then we care for others, our neighbours. Who is your neighbour?

Amen.