

PRACTICING LOVE | Christmas Cards

Well as you might be able to tell, the theme for this morning is Love. Which makes a lot of sense, given that we're entering the Christmas season... which is supposed to bring out all the warm and fuzzy feels, right? However, if we get really honest, I wonder how many of us are looking at the weeks ahead, and feeling like love is going to be pretty hard, in some situations. That maybe we'll be in encounters – whether at family dinners, work parties, even extra time at home – with people we actually find it hard to love. For a whole host of reasons, no doubt. Though it usually comes with at least some degree of “because they haven't loved *us* very well.” Which is hard to grapple with!

But Jesus has some things to say about that, in Matthew 5:

“You're familiar with the old written law, 'Love your friend,' and its unwritten companion, 'Hate your enemy.' I'm challenging that. I'm telling you to love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst. When someone gives you a hard time, respond with the supple moves of prayer, for then you are working out of your true selves, your God-created selves. This is what God does. He gives his best—the sun to warm and the rain to nourish—to everyone, regardless: the good and bad, the nice and nasty.... “In a word, what I'm saying is, Grow up. You're kingdom subjects. Now live like it. Live out your God-created identity. Live generously and graciously toward others, the way God lives toward you.” – Mt. 5:43-48

If we were to get even more honest with ourselves, we'd probably have to admit that we also don't love perfectly. And in fact, maybe we're even part of why those people don't love us so well, because maybe they're not feeling like we're loving them well. And then we both lose.

So what's our call, as Jesus people? It's to live out of the reality of Matthew 5, instead out of our hurts and fears! And we're gonna make some space right now, to work at this in a really practical way. It would be ideal if you happen to have a stack of Christmas cards nearby, that you haven't filled out yet – you'll need just one of them for this practice. If you don't have one then just grab a piece of paper and something to write with, and you can put it into a card later.

Now you might have been planning to send that card to someone you love to love. But who is the person for you, that it's actually hard to love? Can you fill a card with some genuine words of love, encouragement, kindness – real things, of your hopes and heart for them, despite WHATEVER is also making the relationship messy and complicated right now? Can we love like this? I'm gonna say I think we can, if we practice. So let's take a minute, and practice the hard thing.

So **now** what would it take, to do the next step, and actually put that card in the mail? To put yourself way out on that limb. To make the love of Jesus more real for both of you. It might change nothing in the situation! And it could change everything. Regardless, when you practice this kind of thing for real, it changes **you**. So I hope you do find the courage to actually send it. Let's pray.

Dear God, love is hard! Sometimes so hard. And you do it so well, to us, over and over and over again. May we learn to follow you, to walk in your footsteps, and continue to have our hearts formed into the ever-increasing shape of Jesus. Amen.