

Tough Love

Sunday 19th February 2023

- **Opening music:** Elijah Bossenbroek *Amazing Grace* – 3:42
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yqwQ63Hh7Yk>
- **Opening words**
*Love one another and you will be happy. It's as simple and as difficult as that.
There is no other way.*
Michael Leunig – Australian cartoonist, writer, poet and painter.
- **Welcome** – one and all. I am so pleased to be standing here to share this special time with you. Welcome to everyone in the church this morning, welcome to all joining us on Zoom and hello and welcome to those of you watching this on catch-up. I will light our chalice flame as is our custom. The lit chalice is a symbol of our free religious faith and I invite those of you at home to light a candle now if you wish to.
- **Chalice Lighting**
May this chalice flame illuminate all that is good
– all that is beautiful and true
Let it reveal the opportunity behind every trial
The possibility for growth behind each sorrow
And the love that awaits in seed for the awakening warmth of compassion.

Words by Unitarian Rev. Andy Pakula

Let us now open wide our hearts (and lungs) in welcome with our first hymn...
- **First Hymn: Green: no. 172 *All are welcome here***

172 (G) All are welcome here

Now open wide your hearts, my friends,
And I will open mine,
And let us share all that is fair,
All that is true and fine.

We gather in this meeting house –

People of many kinds:
Let us, below the service, seek
A meeting of true minds.

For in our company shall be
Great witnesses of light:
The Buddha, Krishna, Jesus – those
Gifted with clearest sight.

Like them, we seek to know ourselves,
To seek, in spite of fear;
To open wide, to all, our hearts –
For all are welcome here.

Peter Galbraith
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- **Introduction – Tough Love** (month's theme of Love)
Our overall theme for this month is love and today's service is entitled **Tough Love**. I wanted to spend our time together today acknowledging how hard loving can be at times and consider how we can be motivated to love regardless of whatever or whoever comes our way. I would now like to share a prayer by the Unitarian Cliff Reed entitled *Help us to love*.

- **Prayer – by Unitarian Cliff Reed**

Help us to love

Living Spirit of Love, we come before you
once again in need of your help.

We hear your call, and sometimes we even try
to respond, but we don't do very well.

You would have us love our neighbour as we love
ourselves. You would even have us
love our enemies. But so often we have heard those
words, admired the sentiment,
and then forgotten them.

Help us to love, O God, to get beneath the hatred and the

prejudice, the ignorance and the self-righteousness,
to see another human soul as weak as our own.

In this time of worship, help us to hear
your call; but more important still, may we
hear it and obey it when we return to the
world beyond these walls.

We ask this for the sake of our neighbours,
our enemies and ourselves. Amen.

- **Poem** read by Gill in church

The Cookie Thief by Valerie Cox

A woman was waiting at an airport one night,
with several long hours before her flight.
She hunted for a book in the airport shops,
bought a bag of cookies and found a place to drop.

She was engrossed in her book but happened to see,
that the man sitting beside her, as bold as could be,
grabbed a cookie or two from the bag in between,
which she tried to ignore to avoid a scene.

So, she munched the cookies and watched the clock,
as the gutsy cookie thief diminished her stock.
She was getting more irritated as the minutes ticked by,
thinking, "If I wasn't so nice, I would blacken his eye."

With each cookie she took, he took one too,
when only one was left, she wondered what he would do.
With a smile on his face, and a nervous laugh,
he took the last cookie and broke it in half.

He offered her half, as he ate the other,
she snatched it from him and thought... oooh, brother.
This guy has some nerve and he's also rude,
why he didn't even show any gratitude!

She had never known when she had been so galled,
and sighed with relief when her flight was called.

She gathered her belongings and headed to the gate,
refusing to look back at the thieving ingrate.

She boarded the plane, and sank in her seat,
then she sought her book, which was almost complete.
As she reached in her baggage, she gasped with surprise,
there was her bag of cookies, in front of her eyes.

If mine are here, she moaned in despair,
the others were his, and he tried to share.
Too late to apologize, she realized with grief,
that she was the rude one, the ingrate, the thief.

Thank you, Gill. Oh dear – an easy mistake to make though, yes?

Let us sing again now – this time of how love can support us through life.

- **Second Hymn. Purple no. 10 *Be that guide whom love sustains***

10 (P) Be that guide whom love sustains

Be that guide whom love sustains.
Rise above the daily strife:
lift on high the good you find.
Help to heal the hurts of life.

Be that helper nothing daunts –
doubt of friend or taunt of foe.
Ever strive for liberty.
Show the path that life should go.

Be that builder trusting good,
bitter though the test may be:
through all ages they are right,
though they build in agony.

Be that teacher faith directs.
Move beyond the old frontier:
though the frightened fear that faith,
be tomorrow's pioneer!

Carl G. Seaburg 1922-1998

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- **Main address**

I think love is the most powerful and important tool we all have at our fingertips. Like the words of Michael Leunig the Australian cartoonist and writer I quoted at the start, *There is no other way*. We cannot be happy if we are not loving.

Even when faced with some of life's most challenging situations or experiences, love is the key to unlock peace and unity. Love *is* the answer we seek.

Last week Kate spoke about love and the importance of flow to allow love to spread outwards. Kate shared the Buddhist practice of lovingkindness as a way to keep the channels of love flowing.

What about when that flow is blocked by an encounter with a difficult person? This is what I would like us to consider in today's address – tough love, the love of another when it is hard to do.

Now the flow of love can get blocked or withheld for many reasons. In the earlier poem the lady made a genuine mistake in thinking the cookies she had next to her were one's she had purchased. She understandably felt annoyed, not loving when she thought the gentleman was helping himself to her cookies without as much as a please or may I. On discovering it was she that had been helping herself to *his* cookies, she felt remorse. Unfortunately, she could not apologise or make amends at that point, but hopefully no long-term damage was done.

I chose that poem to illustrate how becoming a difficult person can happen easily and innocently enough. I am sure we can all acknowledge that we have been at one time or another someone's difficult person through a misunderstanding.

If I ask you to now think of a difficult person in your life, I imagine it won't necessarily be too arduous a task. Perhaps you have a co-worker who is always taking credit for your work, or a friend or parent who is always critiquing you. Maybe it is an inconsiderate neighbour or maybe it is you who has been difficult lately – with yourself or others.

How do you handle or approach a difficult person? Do you approach them? In this age of tv shows where people are voted "off" and social media where people are "blocked" we might be inclined to apply the avoid and ignore approach wherever possible.

Reflecting on my own actions when writing this I saw how I do this – when booking my seat for days in the office, I am very mindful of who is booked in the seats around

me. I do actively try to avoid those colleagues I find difficult. I am not sure how I feel about this – is that who I want to be?

Not really as this behaviour doesn't fit with what I believe and consider important.

Now, as we are joined here - physically or virtually - in a Unitarian church I think you may share my thinking. The Unitarian tradition is founded on a shared belief in the unity of all beings and the universe. An understanding that there is sense of oneness between us all.

To therefore choose and apply the avoid and ignore approach would be knowingly stop the channel of energy in that person's direction. This is not what I want - I want my behaviours towards others to reflect my beliefs. I believe this is an opportunity I can learn and grow from. Now this requires work and effort on my part but I think it matters. By putting this belief into practice I think I will feel uncomfortable and I will get frustrated *but* my hope is I will start to see the connections between us, what joins us. We both want to be happy, healthy and loved.

Okay – so how can I approach them and how can you approach the difficult person in your life?

The first thing to do regardless of the situation is to apply what Kate mentioned last week - compassion, kindness and empathy.

Adopting a regular practice of lovingkindness can help our views soften towards people. So, I have committed to dedicate sending lovingkindness to a specific colleague. Before going into the office this week, I followed a guided meditation and will continue to do so over the coming weeks. Feel free to ask me in a couple months how it is going.

If the person is someone you feel you have to avoid for your own physical or mental health then the practice can be carried out without having to be in contact with them.

So, we have considered innocent and minor transgressions in the form of cookie theft and annoying colleagues. This can be tough love certainly but what about major wrongs? There is certainly a scale of upset or difficulty we can face.

Perhaps you have been deeply hurt by someone to the point where their behaviour was more than unkind perhaps actually cruel or abusive.

Arguably this is the toughest of love - loving someone or people who have caused you or others serious upset or damage. In these cases, it is perhaps natural to want to turn away rather than turn the other cheek as Jesus teaches in their Sermon on the Mount.

In this case I agree with the teachings of Jesus - in these situations love remains the answer more than ever.

For situations of major hurts or wrongs we can put love into action by adopting what I believe to be the ultimate expression of love – the grace of forgiveness.

Accounts of love through forgiveness are found in all the major religions and philosophies. The Qu-ran, the Bible and the Dhammapada for example all promote forgiveness.

It is important to be clear that by forgiving I do not mean condoning someone's actions. Forgiveness is the conscious decision to let go of hurt and anger caused by a person or persons who have harmed you. With forgiveness you can still disagree and fight for justice whilst doing so.

You can all probably think of some famous examples of people who have been inspired by their spiritual beliefs to show incredible love through forgiveness. People who come to mind straight away are...

- **Martin Luther King** who was arrested, abused and assassinated in 1968 as he fought injustice famously wrote, *"[w]e must develop and maintain the capacity to forgive. He who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love. There is some good in the worst of us and some evil in the best of us. When we discover this, we are less prone to hate our enemies."*
- **Pope John Paul II** was shot in 1981 and forgave the shooter and visited them in prison.
- **Mahatma Gandhi** forgave General Reginald Dyer, the main perpetrator of the Jallianwala Bagh/Amritsar massacre of 1919.
- **14th Dalai Lama** forgives the Chinese for actions committed against Tibet/Tibetans.
- **Nelson Mandela** forgave his captors after being imprisoned for 27 years.

Now, I appreciate the difficulties that we face are not likely to be the same as the examples **but** these stories show us the power of love in action through forgiveness. If they can forgive the atrocities towards them and their people then I can surely, as the Lord's Prayer states forgive those who trespass against me?

It isn't just people of great social, political or religious standing who inspire me. There are many examples of everyday people putting love in action by forgiving those who

cause great pain and sorrow. If you put “inspiring stories of forgiveness” into a search engine online you will come up with hundreds if not thousands of examples.

A more recent example is that of **Gee Walker** whose 18-year-old son Anthony Walker was murdered in 2015. Gee famously drew on their Christian faith and the teachings of Jesus to forgive her son’s murderers.

These stories of courageous tough love in action galvanize and inspire me. They help me find the way if I find myself slipping into negativity. If I sense myself becoming difficult towards myself or others, I remind myself of the union between all beings and the power of love in forgiveness as shown by others. By sharing these remarkable examples today, I hope you may be inspired to do the same.

To internalise anger, frustrations or guilt only cultivates more pain and blocks the flow of love in and out. By reflecting on the examples of others and practicing forgiveness we maintain that sense of connection, of unity and maintain the flow of love.

We will now have another prayer which will be followed by a short period of silence and then a few minutes of music for personal reflection.

- **Prayer by Rev. Sue Woolley – Unitarian**

Spirit of Life and Love, here and everywhere,
May we be aware of your presence in our lives.
May our world be blessed.
May our daily needs be met,
And may our shortcomings be forgiven,
As we forgive those of others.

Give us the strength to resist wrong-doing,
The inspiration and guidance to do right,
And the wisdom to know the difference.
We are your hands in the world; help us to grow.
May we have compassion for all living beings,
And receive whatever life brings,
With courage and trust.

Amen

- **Music for reflection** – Gnus Cello *Birdsong_02*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KEFoQjimVAIE> Cellist Stefano Cabrera (Ka-brair-a) -3:24
- **Third Hymn. Purple no. 110 *Now we sing to praise love's blessing***

110 (P) Now we sing to praise love's blessing

Now we sing to praise love's blessing
 all through our lives;
 laughter, joy, surprise, confessing
 all through our lives,
 love that dreamed a new creation,
 love that dares through incarnation,
 love that offers transformation,
 all through our lives.

How are wounds ache for love's healing
 all through our days:
 how our world needs love's revealing
 in all its ways.
 fearful hearts suspect the stranger,
 hardened national arm for danger,
 love live on, the powerful changer,
 all through our days.

Love's the grace that makes us caring
 all through our lives,
 urges us to warmth and sharing
 all through our lives,
 speaks in us, oppression naming,
 strives in us, injustice shaming,
 lives in us, true peace proclaiming
 all through our lives.

Love's the clown that mocks at winning
 all through the world,
 midwife of each new beginning
 all through the world,
 in the struggles that confounds us,
 in the chaos all around us

love's wide arms with hope surround us
all through the world.

In God's faithful love we flourish
all through our lives,
known and loved, each other nourish
all through our lives:
though the world's demands are pressing,
what life brings is left to guessing,
still we sing to praise love's blessing
all through our lives.

Anna Briggs

Thank you – I will shortly close today's service with a few words. After the service those of us in church are invited to come together in the hall for some coffee, tea and conversation. Those of you on Zoom, you are invited to stay and talk to each other too. The service will end with some closing music and then Sheila will share our notices.

For today's song we have Bob Marley & The Wailers iconic track *One Love* which calls for the world to stop fighting and come together as one in love. Please – sing, sway or dance as you feel moved. Our closing words...

- **Closing words/Benediction**

As we leave this spiritual gathering,
We carry with us our connection to each other,
as members of this community,
and as children of the world.
May we be mindful of this connection
so that our love for each other continues.
Until we are together again, friends,
May you go in peace and be surrounded by love.

- **Closing music** – Bob Marley & the Wailers *One Love*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QMbvptTEUs>

- **Notices**