

2CH Sunday at 7.30

Talks from the NSW Council of Churches

Caring for the community

Presented by David Kerr

INTRODUCTION

A few days after the destruction of the World Trade Centre, a friend of Dr. Stuart Rees, the director of the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Sydney was on a Commercial jet leaving Los Angeles airport en route to Calgary. Just before take-off, the pilot announced that the doors were closed, saying: ‘We are all alone. We could be a family. Please turn to the people next to you and introduce yourselves. If during the flight anyone stands up to threaten you, I want all to act together against that person. Terrorism will not be defeated by armies or by the latest computer technology but by caring for one another. Now sit back, relax and enjoy the flight.’ (SMH Letters to Editor 10.10.01)

There was a friend of mine, who was flying out of the US soon after Sept 11. Seated beside him was a middle Eastern man. My friend who is fairly cool headed and controlled, became increasingly stressed during the flight. When the fellow suddenly got out of his seat, mid flight to get something out of his overhead locker, my friend could contain himself no longer, and gave him a bear hug to restrain him. It was a false alarm, and at the end of the flight the airport security thanked my friend for his prompt action, but suggested he act with a little more restraint next time.

How do we appropriately care for people today in a world that’s been turned up side down?
How can we care for people around us today when there is suspicion and mistrust?

Part 1

How can we care for people around us today when there is suspicion and mistrust?

Today I want to remind you of Christ’s passion to love, summed up in John 13: 34-35, “A new commandment I give you: love one another as I have loved you. If you love one another, then all will know that you are my disciples.” For the Christian, this is not an option. It’s a command. It’s the very core of the gospel.

How can we love in the face of terrorism, threats of intimidation and violence? Who are we to love?

The Christian doesn’t have an option. He or she is called to love as Christ loved the world. Christ’s love is so immense, it embraces the world; all peoples.....every colour, race and creed. The demonstration of the breadth and depth of his love can be so overwhelming, that we can easily dismiss it as impossible for us to consider in our relationships today. The requirement to care for all people, universal love was a new and radical idea in the time of Jesus, and a difficult one to accept and follow.

“How can I love everyone? It’s impossible.” you might say. “I might as well attempt to climb Mt Everest as try to love *some* people in my life! You don’t know what you’re asking” Before I consider these questions, I want to highlight some of the groups that were particularly important to Jesus to care for. They all can appear as mountains to struggle with, on our pilgrimage through life.

YOUR NEIGHBOUR

Jesus said, “You must love God with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind; You must love your neighbour as yourself.” Jesus emphasised that all human beings are our neighbours, even our most despised enemies. It includes even our boss, our employees and colleagues at work.

Morton Kelsey tells of a Christian businessman, Jack Smith, who opened Kelsey’s eyes to loving in the workplace. Out of a dispute, Jack Smith believed God gave him eleven principles that would put Christianity into action in the workplace. Here is his list. They can be used in the home, the sporting club, within the community, and the church.

1. Serve those whom you expect to serve you.
2. Consider no person inferior, but recognize limitations.
3. Lead men and women by action and example.
4. Be humble in speaking about your accomplishments.
5. Teach and be taught.
6. Attack unfairness from any quarter.
7. Believe that your employees must prosper if you are to prosper.
8. Seek the truth no matter who may get hurt.
9. Pray for God’s guidance when you must make a decision affecting the life and future of any person.
10. Make your own decision based on your own best judgment only after careful consideration has been given to all the facts.
11. Forgive honest mistakes where the person making the mistake is honestly self-critical. If people are not self critical, they must learn to be or they can never successfully supervise others or develop to their best abilities.

These principles provide a base for treating human beings as persons, rather than as objects. How our home, work and community life could be transformed if we put these basic practical Christian principles into action.

PART 2

How can we care for people around us today when there is suspicion and mistrust? Who do we need to care for? Jesus emphasised that we need to care for our neighbour and also the stranger

THE STRANGER

“Stranger” can automatically activate the warning light that signifies “stranger danger”. Whilst we need to be wise in connecting with people we don’t know, we are commanded to embrace those that stand outside our friendship circle. The stranger for the Jew may be a visitor from a foreign land (alien), or a sojourner (immigrant). The Torah states that they were to love the stranger because they were once strangers in the land of Egypt, but the Lord rescued them.

Loneliness destroys human beings and nothing contributes more to loneliness than being a stranger, being alienated, separated, or isolated. Solitary confinement is considered one of the worst punishments that can be given out in prison. Being isolated and alienated is one of the contributing factors in depression. Simple depression has become the common cold of modern psychiatry, afflicting people in every age group, especially young people. Research shows that single people are much more likely to be strangers than married people, and that single people have a much higher mortality rate than those who are married.

One of the worst things about being hungry, naked, in prison, is that we feel we have been forgotten....that no one cares....that we are strangers. The visit, the invitation to dinner or a cup of coffee, to meet friends, play a game of cards, to come to a church group, is about reaching out and caring for the stranger. The cry from the stranger across the barriers of separateness is usually an urgent cry, and we need to take time, even if it costs us. Jesus not only calls us to care for the stranger, but also the aged.

THE AGED – WIDOW – WIDOWER

Jesus had a special place in his heart for those who were widows. The Gospels have many parables and stories of a widow that due to her dispossessed status in the community was loved and valued by our Lord. Luke 21:2, Luke 18:3. James highlights an essential part of the Christian faith in James 1:27, “This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.”

Take a moment to think of an aged person you know and imagine what it would be like to receive the care from someone who took seriously these following practical acts of care. They are called “*Beatitudes for Friends of the Aged*”.

Blessed are they who understand my faltering step and shaky hand.

Blessed are they who know my ears must strain to catch the things they say.

Blessed are those who seem to know my eyes are dim and my thoughts are slow.

Blessed are they who looked away when coffee was spilled at the table today.

Blessed are they with cheery smile who stop to chat for a little while,

Blessed are they who never say -“You’ve told that story twice today.”

Blessed are they who know the ways to bring back memories of yesterdays.

Blessed are they who make it known I’m loved, respected, and not alone.

Blessed are they who ease the days on my journey ‘home’ in loving ways.

PART 3

Jesus calls us in a world that has been turned upside down, to care for our neighbour, the stranger, the aged, and also the marginalised.

THE MARGINALISED

Jesus had a burden for the poor, the outcasts, those who lived on the edge of society.

One of the greatest challenges for Australia and other Western nations is the growing gap between the rich and poor. One of the sad consequences of this disparity is the strife and unrest it produces within the local, and the international community.

Current statistics

Are you aware that 20% of the world's population have 80% of the world's economic power. Why do some people hate us so much?

Half the world's population lives on 2\$ a day. 1.2 billion on 1 \$ a day. *As long as there is poverty, hunger and oppression there will be terrorism.*

Last century there were many significant men and women who took up Christ's call to care and made an enormous impact on human suffering. God used the single-mindedness of Dr. Martin Luther King, who changed the social structure of North America. A Quaker tailor, John Woolman, who with no great fanfare preached against slavery. William Wilberforce who fought against slavery in England and won. St. Francis of Assisi who made lady poverty his bride and went to live among the most destitute, the dispossessed and starving, the lepers and outcasts.

Albert Schweitzer is another who showed the same kind of intensity in his love for life. He left a career as a theologian and organist to learn medicine. He went among the forgotten and diseased in Africa to bring concern and healing.

Also Mother Teresa of Calcutta. In a place of incalculable poverty and hopelessness she brought food to the hungry, shelter to the homeless and comfort to the dispossessed.

“Our capacity to love reaches its full maturity when we can look upon the twisted features of a fellow human being in pain and not turn away in fear or disgust but catch a glimpse of the face of the suffering Christ and minister to him or her in all simplicity and tenderness.”

God has not called you to be a Wilberforce, a Schweitzer or a Mother Teresa. He has called you to be whoever you are, with your experience, passions and gifts. Are you willing to act?

Jesus calls us not only to care for the marginalised, but also our enemy.

THE ENEMY

One of the impossible mountains for many to climb is caring for the enemy. Jesus believed that the real ascent to spiritual maturity does not begin, until we start to love our enemies.

Watchman Nee tells about a Chinese Christian who owned a rice paddy next to one owned by a communist man. The Christian irrigated his paddy by pumping water out of a canal, using one of those leg-operated pumps that make the user appear to be seated on a bicycle. Every day, after the Christian had pumped

enough water to fill his field, the communist would come out, remove some boards that kept the water in the Christian's field and let all the water flow down into his own field. That way, he didn't have to pump.

This continued day after day. Finally, the Christian prayed, "Lord, if this keeps up, I'm going to lose all my rice, maybe even my field. I've got a family to care for. What can I do?"

In answer to his request, the Lord put a thought in his mind. So, the next morning he arose much earlier, in the predawn hours of darkness, and started pumping water into the field of his communist neighbor. Then he replaced the boards and pumped water into his own rice paddy. In a few weeks both fields of rice were doing well—and the communist became a Christian.

CONCLUSION

Jesus needs your hands to touch those who are struggling in your community: the aged, the widows, widowers, the orphans, the homeless, the poor, the refugee, the stranger, even those that we may consider our enemy. Opening ourselves to God's transforming love is often painful, and feels risky, but it is the key to unlocking our fears to touch the pain of others. There is the need for folk to visit the aged and the sick who have been abandoned by their families, develop friendship by teaching English to migrants, volunteer to work with the homeless, care for children and women who have been victims of domestic violence.....

In *The Divine Intruder*, James R. Edwards writes:

Like many people, I was shocked by the catastrophe on Mount Everest in May 1996 in which a dozen mountaineers perished. One of the most disturbing sideshows in that circus of tragedies was the story of two Japanese climbers who in their summit bid, bypassed three injured, starving, and freezing climbers. The Japanese had sufficient provisions to render aid to the stranded climbers, but they did not want to jeopardize their ascent by stopping to assist them. As a result, all three climbers died. Later, when asked why they had not stopped to help, one of the climbers said, 'We were too tired to help. Above 8,000 meters is not a place where people can afford morality.'

In climbing Everest or any of the mountains of life, all climbers are their brothers' keepers; people need to be hugged, they require our care, otherwise, they can freeze to death.