

Sermon – Hospitality: Romans 12:9-21

Rev. Bruce Stanley www.waitara.anglican.asn.au

● III – FAKE kills

In June last year, a 66 year old man went to a chiropractor to get a neck adjustment. The chiropractor was a fake. The man was taken to hospital with a broken neck and declared brain dead. Mind you, the chiropractor was operating out of his garage! Fake.

In April 2004, around 60 babies died and over 220 suffered from malnutrition in Eastern China. You may remember hearing the story – some company out to make some easy money had been selling “fake” milk formula which had no nutritional value. It contained flour and sugar and other useless ingredients. Fake.

“Fake” things kills. Fake people kill. Fake is dangerous.

But what about the danger of fake love? Would you say that fake love was dangerous?

● In Romans 12:9, Paul says that love must be sincere, genuine, the real thing.

Love must not be fake.

He doesn't say “Genuine love is better” or “Real love is helpful” or “Try and love each other sincerely”. He says that love must be genuine!

Why?

Because genuine love will deepen our community.

And false love will kill and destroy our community.

● So today I'm going to ask us a very important question: **Do we have genuine love?**

And I want to ask that question in 2 parts today – and the first part is this:

● 1. Do we **honour** one another? (Romans 12:10)

● In Romans 12:10, Paul says “*Honour one another above yourselves.*”

He's not saying: “put up” with people. He's not saying: do enough to get by in your relationships. He's not saying “try and get along with people the best you can. He's not even saying” respect others” – although that is important! Paul is saying much, much more than that. He's saying “Honour”.

● III – Taj Mahal legend of building

Let me tell you one of my favourite **legends** about the building of the Taj Mahal. (which you may have heard before).

In 1631, Shah Jahan, the emperor of India was devastated when his wife died having their 14th child. So a year after her death, he resolved to build this temple, the Taj Mahal, to serve as her tomb. He had her coffin placed in the middle of a large block of land, and temple construction began around the coffin. He spared no expense.

Weeks turned into months as they built this incredible temple. He stopped mourning the loss of his wife, and was now consumed by the building of the temple.

One day, the legend says, he was crossing from one side of the construction site to the other and bumped his leg against an old wooden box. He brushed the dust off his leg and ordered one of the workers to throw the box away. He didn't realise that the box was his wife's coffin.

It's just a legend, but it makes a great point. Sometimes, when we want to honour someone, we lose our focus. Sometimes, honour is replaced by our own goals, or ambitions, or hopes and dreams. When that happens, genuine love ceases. Fake love takes over. That's why Paul writes:

- "Honour one another above yourselves."

Not because it's a *nice* thing to do – but because we **NEED** this to be the community of God. We need genuine love that honours others above ourselves. Please, think about that for a while. "Honour one another above yourselves." That's genuine love. That's the love of Jesus. That's the love of the cross. It's not just about putting others first. It's not about thinking of others before yourself. It's not even about priority. It's about honouring others. It's about how we see other people. Do we honour them enough to understand that **THEY** have an important place in our community. Do we honour their place above our own?

I want to read to you a quote from a great book called "Life Together" by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer was a Christian theologian who was killed by the Nazis at the end of World War 2. He writes:

- "... a Christian needs another Christian who speaks God's word to him. He needs him again and again when he becomes uncertain and discouraged, for by himself he cannot help himself..." (p12)

Bonhoeffer is saying that we **need** one another to speak God's word to us. That is the most important way to honour one another. To speak God's word into each other's lives. We **need** that in our community. We need to humble ourselves to recognise that we need each other.

Our second question is this:

● 2. Do we practice hospitality? (Romans 12:13)

I guess our first response is: Of course! I imagine when many of us saw the topic for today – "Hospitality" – you might have thought – having someone over for a meal; making dinner for someone who's sick; visiting someone in hospital; toys and tucker for those in need. Generally, when we think of hospitality, we think of caring for the needs of others. Like Paul says: "Share with God's people who are in need."

But... it's much more than that. What Paul is talking about is **pursuing** hospitality. Go after it. Seek out ways to be hospitable. But not just in any way you feel. God wants us to pursue hospitality **His** way. Let me give an example:

III – piano and sax – play both – short piece on piano with music, horrible piece on sax without music.

I hope you'll notice two things from that:

1. It's easy to see when people following the music – or at least when they try to!

- You need music for direction – and you can tell when someone's following music.

But it's not just about following **any** music. It's got to be **good** music. Written by someone who can really write music. You can play "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star" with music and it won't sound as amazing as Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata".

When it comes to practicing hospitality, the music we need to follow is God's word. When we practice hospitality, we need to listen to the music of the gospel. Hospitality isn't just about food and company. It's about sharing our lives God's way. It's about sharing with **humility**, sharing with **self sacrifice**, sharing with **honour**. We need to look to God and say: "God, teach me what is genuine love is." "God teach me what genuine hospitality is." We need to follow **God's** music.

2. The second thing I hope you noticed is that it's easy to see when someone **practices**!

And it's easy to see I haven't spent more than 12 minutes practicing the saxophone in my whole life!

- You need to practice!

Every day of our Christian life is **practice**. Every day we need to be practicing putting into action God's Words. Practicing caring for each other's needs. Not just when someone's sick. Not just when you have time. Practicing and pursuing. Seeking opportunities.

Our community doesn't just "happen" here at church. It happens, and happens really well, because a lot of people pursue hospitality. They don't just cook a meal. They hunt down opportunities to provide other people's needs. They don't say "Why isn't anyone looking after my needs?" Because they're out serving others, honouring others above themselves. They don't wait for an opportunity. They hunt down opportunities! They see someone in need and they bring that person to God in prayer and ask – how can I help them? They phone someone out of the blue because they haven't talked to them for a while. They have people over for a meal during their busiest week, because they know it's needed. They visit someone because God's Spirit moves them to. Because in prayer, they're listening to God's spirit.

Genuine love is patient. But it's not inactive. It pursues. Just like the cross. The cross is where God pursued us to rescue us from our own sin.

Think about those words – honour. Hospitality. Think about the cross of Jesus. And listen to these other words as again: (12:14-17a)

- *"¹⁴Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. ¹⁶Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. ¹⁷Do not repay anyone evil for evil."*

Genuine love is about humbling ourselves in each other's lives, just like Jesus did. When that happens, transformation happens. People change and communities change.

Let me read to you one more quote from that book, "Life Together":

- *"I have community with others and I shall continue to have it only through Jesus Christ. The more genuine and the deeper our community becomes, the more will everything else between us recede, the more clearly and purely will Jesus Christ and his work become the one and only thing that is vital between us." (p14)*

That's God's community. A community where everything else recedes except the work of our Lord Jesus Christ and his gospel.

- A place where we **honour one another** above ourselves. A place where we **pursue hospitality**.

God's community is a place where the work of God is clearly seen, no longer confused by personal ambitions or goals. A place where people can come to receive not only relationships and community through Jesus, but the grace that he offers through his death on the cross.

- Do you honour others above yourself?
Do you pursue hospitality?

Do you have, do we have, genuine love?

Let's pray.