

Series: Words & Deeds Part 1: “They Matter”
“Generous Orthodoxy”
Hosea 5:15-6:6
Psalm 50:7-15
Romans 4:13-25
Matthew 9:9-13

The culture wars continue to divide our citizenry politically, relationally, and religiously.

Thank goodness for Jesus’ modelling of generous orthodoxy. Geneva has come a long way being a more generously welcoming place since my arrival October 1, 2014. Yes, we do an amazing ministry of being generous with our words and deeds as Christ followers in this place.

Jesus discovers and experiences love and faith among the sinful, broken, sick, and outcast, not the religious leaders. Matthew and his tax collector friends spend time with Jesus and the synagogue leader reaches out to Jesus and Jesus heals his daughter. Jean Vanier, founder of the L’Arche communities, told the following story about persevering in our practice of generous unconditional love:

I know a man who lives in Paris. His wife has Alzheimer’s. He was an important businessman—his life filled with busyness. But he said that when his wife fell sick, “I just couldn’t put her into an institution, so I kept her. I fed her. I bathed her. “I went to Paris to visit them, and this businessman who had been very busy all his life said, “I have changed. I have become more human.” I got a letter from him recently. He said that in the middle of the night his wife woke him up. She came out of the fog for a moment, and she said, “Darling, I just want to say thank you for all you’re doing for me.” Then, she fell back into the fog. He told me, “I wept, and I wept.”

Sometimes Christ calls us to love people who cannot love us in return. They live in the fog of mental illness, disabilities, poverty, spiritual blindness, and even the culture wars. As we serve them, we may only receive fleeting glimpses of gratitude. But just as Jesus has loved us in the

midst of our confusion, so we continue to love others as they walk through a deep fog.¹ And that's generous orthodoxy.

Hosea 5:15-6:6, Psalm 50:7-15, Romans 4:13-25, and Matthew 9:9-13 make this point: God patiently waits for God's children to return to him all the while their love diminishing for God. God patiently waits for our fickle love to transform more and more into a steadfast love for God.

Matthew 9:9-13 urges the following for our consideration: no one is outside the circle of God's family. All are included, whether they know it or not, period! There are no insiders or outsiders.

- Jesus associates with the sinner, broken, sick, and outcast.
- Jesus is not judgmental.
- Jesus asserts that the sinner, broken, sick, and outcast who acknowledge their need of a Savior and begin that lifelong journey of Christian discipleship will get into heaven ahead of the self-righteous.
- Jesus seeks out the sinner, broken, sick, and outcast for they desire a physician.
- Jesus affirms faith lived out through duty and faith marked by gentle rhythms of presence and participation. They are both entries to a life of generous orthodoxy.

Faithful love is what pleases God. A love filled with compassion, justice, and unity.

The Pharisees were professionals who policed those not adhering to the commandments of the Law. Jesus received and sought out the sinner, broken, sick, and outcast and welcomes them. These folk invite Jesus to their tables. The sinner, broken, sick, and outcast are in the best position to pursue righteousness. They often exceed the love which their naysayers have for God.

¹Source Stanley Hauerwas & Jean Vanier, *Living Gently in a Violent World* (IVP, 2008), 66.

Through the Incarnation of the Son, knowing God becomes possible in a whole new way. We should “press on” as the tax collectors and the synagogue leader did, to know Christ by his word in the scriptures and his body in the sacraments. The goal of pressing on is not adherence to a set of rituals, but a pathway to a generous and direct experience with God.²

The bad news is that we are all sinners. The bad news is that we are all broken. The bad news is that we are all sick. The bad news is that we are all classified as outcasts at various points along our journey of Christian discipleship. The good news is that Jesus continues to invite us to look up and beyond our circumstances and experience grace, acceptance, forgiveness, love, and mercy. Generous orthodoxy is the key to living an abundant life.

Geneva is a congregation characterized by “a generous orthodoxy.” That means, we are theologically centered in Jesus Christ, rooted in the gospel, set in the Reformed tradition, committed to loving God, loving others, and making disciples as a church in the Presbyterian Church (USA), and not being known by boundaries of who’s in and who’s out. Generous orthodoxy is characterized by grace, compassion, love, justice, unity, mercy, and the practice the Christian disciplines of confession and forgiveness. Continue this journey of Christian discipleship characterized by generous orthodoxy. Amen.

*This sermon was preached on Trinity Sunday, 11 June 2023
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²In the four paragraphs of textual analysis above, I have benefited from the thinking of Song-Mi Suzie Park, Mark Ramsey, W. Scott Haldeman, Efrain Agosto, Wyndy Corbin-Reuschling, Sonia E. Waters, Oliver Larry Yarbrough and Mary F. Foskett in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery, Cynthia L. Rigby and Carolyn J. Sharp, editors, *Connections, Year A, Volume 3* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), 50-52, 53-54, 55-57, 58-60, 61-62, 63-65, and 65-67.