



# Love your neighbour?

A faith perspective on fear of others

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From Newcastle. **For the world.**

Being part of a university brings us into contact with ideas, cultures, attitudes and beliefs that may be different from our own. While it is great to be part of such a diverse community, it can lead to us question aspects of our own world-view, or feel the need to defend it when scrutinized.

Following the 'Brexit' referendum of 2016, many people were genuinely surprised that so many people voted differently to themselves. This perhaps showed that we surround ourselves with people who share a similar outlook. Comforting as this may be, it can lead to mistrust, dislike or even fear of others. We will look at something of a faith perspective on this over the following slides.



<http://www.middlebury.edu/newsroom/archive/2016-news/node/542305>

**“There are three urgent and indeed great problems that we face not only in the United States of America but all over the world today. That is the problem of racism, the problem of poverty and the problem of war and the things that I have been trying to do in our struggle at home and in the struggle that is taking place all over the world has been to deal forthrightly and in depth with these great and grave problems that pervade our world.”**

Rev Dr Martin Luther King’s visit to Newcastle University on November 13<sup>th</sup> 1967 rightly remains a significant moment in the life of this institution. He was being awarded an honorary doctorate in recognition of the importance of his work as a civil rights leader. During his acceptance speech, he identified three great and urgent problems which the world was facing – war, poverty and racism, or in slightly broader terms – **conflict, injustice and prejudice.**

<https://www.ncl.ac.uk/congregations/honorary/martinlutherking/>  
<https://speccollstories.ncl.ac.uk/Martin-Luther-King-at-Newcastle-University/index.html>

We do not need to look far to see evidence of their influence in our world, today - our news feeds are full of examples. I was shocked to discover that only about 15% of news coverage in the UK can be classified as positive (2019, PRMoment). We are encouraged, on a daily basis, to **mistrust, dislike and even fear** the planet we call home and the people we share it with. And it is not just the headline stories. The conflict, injustice and prejudice can be just as present in the mundane, everyday interactions. It would appear that Rev Dr King was calling out the things that prevent us relating well to each other.



<https://www.prmoment.com/pr-research/uk-tops-the-charts-for-negative-news-stories>  
<https://www.ncl.ac.uk/congregations/honorary/martinlutherking/>

Talking with people from the many different backgrounds that make up our university community, it would appear that most traditions and cultures have an iteration of the 'golden rule' – the idea that we should treat others as we would like to be treated – a sense of mutual respect. Many world faiths go beyond this and state that we should treat other people with compassion, even if it is not reciprocated.

If we look a little more closely at Christianity, we can see that Jesus Christ instructed His followers to do just this. When asked what is the greatest rule for life, He simply said to, '**Love God in every aspect of your life and love your neighbour as yourself**' (Mark 12:28-34). It has inspired many a great Instagram post, but what does it actually mean, to love our neighbour? Regardless of our own beliefs, there is real challenge here for us all.

I think the first thing we can take from Jesus' words is that love is not just a nice concept or a warm feeling, it requires work. Acting out of love towards other people requires a series of active choices – to build life rather than diminish it. It is good to ask ourselves, are our actions respectful and honouring towards other people, or have we contributed to a sense of mistrust, dislike or fear? And notice how He tells us to 'love your neighbour as yourself'. In other words, **you can't give what you don't have**. He is reminding us not to neglect our own wellbeing; your mental, physical and spiritual health. Jesus was a constant advocate of healthy relationships with God, other people and the world we live in.



So, challenged by those words of Jesus, what could we do to work on healthy relationships with our neighbours? I think there are three areas that are worth considering. **Love requires investment.** You give your time, energy, skills and resources to build up that which you love. To love our neighbour is no different. We might even say this investment is sacrificial, in that there may be a need to deny yourself of something, for the greater good. Are the things you enjoy causing problems for your neighbour? Can we stand alongside our neighbour when they are facing difficult times? Are we prepared to speak out on matters of social justice even when we can't see how they directly affect our circumstances?

**Love requires education.** Are we even trying to understand where other people are coming from? What bias is present in the things that we read and watch? What unconscious bias do we carry? Mistrust, dislike and fear are easier to spread if people don't actively seek the deeper truth. Perhaps we need to challenge ourselves to move beyond assumptions about who people are and how we relate to them.

Loving our neighbour is a commitment to life-long learning as we adapt to an ever-changing world.

**Love requires dialogue.** Dialogue is a two way process. It is not simply stating our own opinions or trying to win a debate or argument. Love asks us to consider what it mean to actively listen to the opinions and experiences of others, to be affected by them.

**‘When we really listen, we move beyond stereotypes and perceive complexity, richness, and nuance, contradictions and struggles.’**

(Rev Dr Barbara Glasson, Former President of the Methodist Church in Great Britain - Church Times, Nov 2018)

However, entering into dialogue can be uncomfortable, as we choose to make ourselves vulnerable. In 2012, Christian author, Brian McLaren, had this to say about the fear of where dialogue might take us,

**‘When we build our identity around hostility, it’s a very strong identity. Then, we begin to fear that, if we reduce the hostility, we will weaken our identity. If I say that it matters less to me that you’re Muslim—then does it also matter less to me that I’m Christian? Does it have to be like that?’**

<https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2018/30-november/features/interviews/interview-barbara-glasson-president-elect-of-the-methodist-conference>  
<https://readthespirit.com/explore/brian-mclaren-on-why-interfaith-peace-begins-at-home/>

Both of these perspectives are addressing dialogue between people from different faith traditions, but the concepts here could apply in many different contexts. **Dialogue creates the possibility of reconciliation.**

In the 1980's there was a famous TV advert in the UK, where we were told, 'It's good to talk.' Perhaps they were right.



### Points for reflection

- **What is your response to Rev Dr King's speech from 1967?**
  - Have you watched the video of his speech?
  - How might it still be relevant today?
- **How do you feel about Jesus' words, when He asks us to 'love our neighbour as ourselves'?**
  - Who is your neighbour?
  - Is it realistic?
- **What gives you life?**
  - How do you look after your own wellbeing?
  - What impact does this have on others?
- **What could you do to 'build life rather than diminish it'?**
- **Investment, education, dialogue. Is there something you could work on to further develop one of these in your own life?**