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John 13:1-13. Tend; to respond to human need with loving kindness
Matt 11:28-30.

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Last Sunday Jon introduced our topic for Lent, the 5 Marks of Mission. 5 areas of the church's work to tell, teach, tend, transform, and treasure. As Jon said all 5 are linked together by love. This week our focus is tend, to care for. Responding to human need by loving service is something that we, in this church, love to do. It's what our pastoral team, hardship fund and food bank exist for.

I'd like to start with an illustration. Two people planted vegetable gardens. Both prepared the soil and sowed the seeds. One left the plants to grow naturally, the other worked in the garden regularly. At harvest time the first found rotting tomatoes, plants choked with weeds. There was very little to be harvested.

The other had collected many baskets of produce by having a look every other day. Both people planted but only one "tended".

Can we make a comparison with our Spiritual lives? I can say "I believe in Jesus" and leave it at that or I can actively seek to open myself to more of God's life flowing through me. In other words we can "tend" our spiritual gardens!

By tending to our spiritual lives and allowing Jesus to tend to us we gain the resources we need so that we can tend to others in loving service. Did you notice the words of our first hymn?

"Father like He tends and spares us, well our feeble frame he knows, in His hands he gently bears us...."

He does the tending for all of us but we have a part to play.

Allowing ourselves to be cared for by Jesus or others can make us feel vulnerable. This image is from Charlie Mackesy's best selling book, *The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse*. "What is the bravest thing you've ever said?" asked the boy. "Help", said the horse." We always need to remember that asking for help takes courage, it puts us in a vulnerable position which often goes against the grain in our society. Vulnerability is, for most of us, an uncomfortable feeling. But it's a feeling we need to get used to if we are going to be the caring people Jesus wants us to be.

Making ourselves vulnerable requires trust. Trust that we won't be made to feel foolish, shamed, or rejected. It helps if we know and trust the person we are making ourselves vulnerable to. So where are we on knowing and trusting Jesus? Jon ended his talk last week by saying the very best news of all is Jesus. Are we really convinced of this truth?

How do we get to know what Jesus is really like so we can trust Him more?

Of course the gospels themselves are the first place to look. There are plenty of other resources available to enable us to expand our awareness of who Jesus is. Our lent course discussing excerpts from *The Chosen* is one. This is another, this book "Gentle and Lowly" by Dane Ortlund. It's about discovering the heart of Jesus, who he really is. It starts with the premise of what Jesus says about himself. We find it in Matt 11:28-30.

“Come to me, all who labour and are heavy burden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”ESV.

If we were describing Jesus from what we know of Him at present, what might we say? I’m not sure it would be “gentle and lowly”. Maybe He is “exalted and demanding in heart” or “austere and dignified in heart”.

In my early days as a Christian I remember thinking I would have to do outstandingly good things so that Jesus would notice me. I felt I needed to deserve to be loved! I tried different things; I was never going make it! And that was the truth.

I will never be good enough but I don’t need to be, because Jesus is! It’s why he came to earth, it’s why He died on the cross. He lived the perfect life I never can. I am loved just as I am and so are you! Lord, thank you for your kindness and compassion.

The gospels are full of Jesus’ kindness and compassion. His acts of humble service are plentiful. Washing the disciples feet (John 13:1-13) is a wonderful example. Have you ever had your feet washed at a Maundy Thursday service? I wonder if you felt like Peter? This painting illustrates something interesting. Notice Peter’s hands. One almost hugging Jesus, acknowledging the intimacy of the situation and one raised, resisting almost pushing Jesus away. Is this what it’s like for us? We want to help others and we want to be helped but there’s a resistance in us. The letting go, the vulnerability is uncomfortable. Somehow this 2 fold dynamic, or paradox is always there. The pain and the joy go together. It’s how it is in the Kingdom of God. Not either/or but both/and. The gospels show us the lifestyle Jesus models for us. Its the one He wants us to follow.

Jesus says to each of us “Come to me”. It’s the primary thing He asks of us. Come to me and keep coming to me. Again and again! Only then will we have the compassion to love our neighbours as ourselves and respond to their need with loving kindness.