



MYERS PARK BAPTIST CHURCH

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“Burden Bearing Love: Living as Christ’s Community”

A Sermon delivered by Rev. Carrie Veal at Myers Park Baptist Church

On February 23, 2025, from John 13:34-35 and Galatians 6:2.

Dr. Telika McCoy stood in our pulpit just a few weeks ago, and she opened with a horrific story of the Ku Klux Klan in the city of Chattanooga. Chattanooga is my city of birth. I have wonderful, beautiful, life shaping memories of my childhood in Chattanooga. I was, of course, mortified to know, that in the year 2025 the Klan is alive and well in my hometown. And I could hear the gasps that came from the congregation as Dr. McCoy is telling the story. I wasn't here that day, but I watched it. Dr. McCoy is one of my dearest friends. And her sermon has had me thinking, ever since the morning that she preached. Her words have had me thinking about Justice. What is it? Who is it for? How are we being, showing, living into the law of Christ, the law of Love, in our Justice work?

We hit the justice mark pretty well here at Myers Park Baptist Church. And we also miss it. And we miss it because we are human. We are not perfect. I hope that's not news to you. We do parts of justice really well. We have advocated for the rights of women for years. We have advocated for the rights of LGBTQIA+ folks for years. We have worked on our racial justice issues for years. But I think there are some justice issues that we don't think about as justice. As I've been sitting with a text, as I have been reading through what is the surrounding verses that we read today, as I have been listening for God's nudging, I have come to realize, that I think that the problem of justice, where we miss her mark, is that we don't make it very personal. We don't think about where we have **impacted injustice**. Where we have witnessed injustice. And where we have been complacent in that. And so, this is the direction I want us to talk about, think about, and be ready to be changed and challenged by God by when we leave this place this morning.

Will you join me in prayer?

It has been a wild 32 days in America. We have been witnessing what many legal experts are calling a Constitutional Crisis. If you spend even 30 minutes watching, reading or listening to the news, then you may be like me, trying to figure out what to do.

Do I boycott this store or that company?

Do I sign this petition or call that senator?

Do I speak out against this policy or that one?

Where do I even begin?

It's too much.

While I don't have the answers to those questions, here is what I have learned.



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Boycotting can make a difference, if you are willing to stick with it. Boycotting takes endurance and commitment. It might mean you have to dig deep and do some research to see how one area is connected to another. In the 1990s the Southern Baptist Convention told their people to boycott Disney. And many people took that to mean stop going to the parks. Few realized that they needed to give up ESPN, ABC, and a myriad of other businesses.

Calling senators and signing petitions might make you feel good in the moment. We should do them because the names, the record and the opinions matter but often they are not enough of an impact because we are just one voice, one signature. I love to speak out about policies I disagree with but in reality, I have very little power, very little influence and so I don't get very far. So, then what do I, what do we do? Just throw our hands in the air, give up and say, it doesn't matter. Well, that feels like failure. And if I know anything about myself, and about you, failure is not an option.

So, as I often do, I try to bring it to the six feet around me. I take a moment to look around and see what can make me feel like I'm doing some good, making some difference in an overwhelming world.

In fulfilling the Law of Christ, those who follow Jesus, are given a freedom that **REQUIRES** them, that brings them the responsibility to care for the welfare of others. Those who follow Jesus, are to become keepers, care givers of our siblings. We are to be devoted to the lives of others. We are to be bearing their burdens, not out of a sense of obligation or egotism. Rather, out of a desire to live as Christ, to follow the law of Christ, the law of love. Love that is self-sacrificing with no accolades.

If we take Paul's words in Galatians as individuals, then we experience a joy and a hope that comes from God. When we apply the words to the community, we share the burden, we share the load. It should not fall on the shoulders of one. While we are to follow Jesus, we are not Jesus. We are only human, not divine. Paul's words here are to be an encouragement to the hearers. Rather than serving out of arrogance, hubris or competition of what one can do that another cannot, let us instead be guided and governed by the love commandment, following the manner of Christ and the way in which he served.

The advantage that we have in the year 2025 is that we have the Gospels to tell us what the law of Christ was and is. As I have sat with the concept of justice, the concept of being a burden bearer, being a citizen of the law of Christ, that is love, these are the questions that come to my mind. And so, I pose the question to all of us:
What does care look like?



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When I was in seminary the primary teaching of what the Bible, was that the Bible was gods story of reconciliation. And I agree with this. Yet over time I've realized that a part of that theme, perhaps the most significant part, is community. It starts in Genesis and wraps up in Revelation. Gods story of community. Gods desire for God's Children to live in community. It is through community that we see God; that we become our best selves and that we create a place for Gods dream to come true. And being community means bearing each other's burdens. It's good to have history, legacy, and moments of pride to point to. But if we cling to those, if we stop our learning, our growing, our achievements at that point, then what are working towards?

In the letter to the Galatians, Paul is talking about the ongoing behavior, the ongoing actions, that the people in the church of Galatia are doing that is not aligned with being a follower of Jesus. And I'm not going to stand here and give a list of what I believe are behaviors that are or are not like Jesus. However, I will point out the nature of the Jesus that we see in scripture. Jesus who loved people and showed them deep kindness. Jesus who served and helped and healed. Jesus who welcomed everyone, talked to everyone, and encouraged his followers to do the same.

We also see a Jesus who did not let people remain in their behavior. When the rich young ruler, comes to him and says, what must I do to inherit the kingdom, what must I do to be with God for eternity, Jesus lays out the basic tenants of mosaic law. The rich young ruler replies, oh, I have done all of that. So, Jesus says, then sell what you have, give it to the poor, abandon the lifestyle that you are accustomed to. And the rich young ruler goes away and sadness.

When Jesus meets the woman at the well, he talks to her, asking her for water, telling her that he has a gift that will outlast any water anywhere. She asks for this water. And he tells her to get her husband and come back. She lies to him, tries to evade his ask by giving a less than truthful answer. When he says wait a minute, this is actually not the truth, and they have a conversation, she leaves that conversation knowing she must behave in a new way, and she tells others the remarkable things he said to her.

We see Jesus encountering religious officials, religious leaders, what we can actually call congregational leaders, in their behavior. Jesus never expects anyone to remain where they are. Jesus does not accept the phrase, "well you know that's just So-and-so, and we know how they can be." Instead, Jesus says you are my follower. It is your responsibility to carry the burden of those around you. Follow the example I gave you.

Help those who are in recovery with their struggle.
Help those who are struggling with grief feel less lonely.
Help those who are being bullied and confront the bully.



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You see, in Jesus we do not have an example of someone who is just going to pat your back and make you feel good. We have a Jesus who says do better. And we have a Jesus, who says loving your neighbor, is more than just feeding them, clothing them, housing them, educating them. It is helping them to do and be and live better. This is the law of Christ.

Every time I prepare to preach, I ask myself as a proclaimer in this pulpit, as a minister of Jesus, where am I in this scripture? How am I living what I believe God is telling me to share with you? As a follower, I have to believe that it should and does start with me. After all, how can I encourage you to do these things if I am not doing them.

Admittedly, I don't have a problem, having hard conversations with difficult people. It's a gift truly that I believe God has given me because it is not a gift that the average person has. So, my growth area is learning to do that in a way that the message is actually heard. If my conversation is only done in a way with harsh words, harsh tone, harsh everything, then we will get nowhere. This is a constant growth for me. It's a constant reminder that I need to pause. That I need to take a deep breath. That I need to center myself. And because that is my challenge, my burden, that doesn't mean that should just give up, not do the work, and decide that I cannot do it. By choosing to change where I need, means I am putting others before myself. It reminds me that the world, the community, the relationships are what matter, are what should matter, more than what might be a hard thing to change in me.

What I've realized in my 40+ years on this planet, is that being in relationship, being in community, being in a church requires work. And it is not just the obvious work of teaching a Sunday school class, making sure that children are cared for or visiting the people who cannot get out. It is about caring for those who cannot care for themselves. It is about sheltering the unhoused, feeding the hungry and welcoming the strangers.

And it's about being in relationship.

Being in relationship, doing the work, means not letting people stay where they are. We should love, accept and bless all people. But it can be harmful to the community to accept all behavior. I don't want all my behaviors to be accepted.

Do you?

There are two questions I have for you:

The first is the same one I have of myself, what is your growth area? Are you willing to let others share the burden with you? How can you allow the love of Christ to be seen in the world?

The second question is, what is a burden you can help someone bear? How can you be a burden bearer, being one who lives the example of Jesus, washing feet, loving people and helping them be who God desires them to be?



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Do you have a friend, relative, neighbor or even an acquaintance who has been or could be impacted by policies and decisions that are being made in Washington DC?

Do you have a friend who is facing a family situation, and they need a non-judgmental, non-advice-giving friend?

Do you need to ask for help in your inner growth work, needing a trusted friend to hold you accountable?

Do you need to speak up for the ones who are being bullied?

Do you need to have a difficult conversation with a difficult person?

Are you the difficult person who needs help?

Do you need to tell your church staff, the ones who you may not see on a Sunday, that you appreciate the work they do?

Do you need to pay off the lunch account for a child in a school?

Do you need to admit that you are not an expert in justice and seek help on how to learn more?

What is the burden you can bear, what is the love that you can show?

Up front we have a basket of rocks. They are small. They can fit in your pocket and not add much weight to your person. Yet they can symbolize one burden that you are willing to pick up and carry for someone. Burden carrying is an act of love, an act of obedience, an act of following Jesus.

You are invited to think about a burden you can carry and one that maybe you can share with someone and allow them to help you carry it. and come get your rock to remind you of your saying yes to the love, to the law of Christ.