



One Page Sermon

By Rev. Robb McCoy

October 6, 2024

Malice Toward None: Love

Recap of sermon from October 6, 2024

Scripture: Matthew 22:34-40

The moment I started this series I knew I wanted to talk about Leslie Knope and Ron Swanson. These are two main characters from the TV show *Parks and Recreation*. Played by Amy Poehler and Nick Offerman, the pair were a perfect odd-couple friendship that personified the values that we have been talking about during this series.

Leslie and Ron were government workers (in the Parks and Recreation Department) in a fictional mid-size city in southern Indiana. Ron was a strict libertarian. Despite working in the government, he felt the government was a corrupt, festering beast that devoured resources. Leslie, on the other hand, was deeply devoted to the precepts of good government. She believed that the government should work to provide a better life for people in her city.

There was much humor mined in the fields of their disagreements. They were fundamentally opposed in all things, and yet—they were friends. They trusted each other's integrity. They respected each other's opinions. Even through disagreement, they forged a friendship based on kindness, compassion, humility, respect, and love.

When I watch reruns of the show now, there is a part of me that is saddened by how far-fetched it feels. Given our current political climate (the show ran for seven seasons from 2009-2015), it feels quaint to tell the story of a friendship despite such harsh political differences. It doesn't have to be this way, and for many people, it isn't. There is hope that love can overcome the deep divisions we face.

There are relationships that can survive the polarization, but we need to do the work of love. That includes resisting the temptation to fall into the trap of blame and fear. Mass media—and many politicians—try to turn up the level of fear so that we can continue to fight. Blame and suspicion escalates fear, which leads to dehumanizing each other.

Love is the only thing that can break that cycle. When we recognize the humanity in each other, we may be able to live into the greatest commandment: To love God with all your heart, mind, and strength; and to love your neighbor as yourself. This is the foundation of our faith.

Jesus shared this command in the midst of great tension. When the polarized groups that surrounded him were devolving in blame and fear, he recalled this fundamental truth that bound them together. Sadducees, Pharisees, and other factions were closing in, and he reminded them of love.

There was another time in our history when the differences seemed insurmountable. In the waning days of the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln gave his second inaugural address. In it, he did not call upon God the triumphant victor who led the North to a holy victory. Instead, he lowered the temperature with humility and a reminder that the vanquished prayed and loved God, too. He did not call for retaliation, but for charity.

"With malice toward none with charity for all with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right let us strive on to finish the work we are in to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan ~ to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations."

Lincoln called upon the value of compassion to heal wounds. Love can heal wounds. Love can lead us where we need to go. While fear can spin us out of control and leave us disillusioned and angry, love can return us to God's holiness. Love of neighbor. Love of self. Love of God. These are the foundations we can cling to through the storms ahead. Hold malice toward none, and God will show us a path of peace.



Ron Swanson and Leslie Knope, *Parks and Recreation* (2009)

**Next Week: The Gospel According to Peanuts
Charlie Brown, the Seeker. Ecclesiastes 1:3-11**