



Be kind, most of the time

David Hines © 10 October 2021

Intro

When I agreed to preach at this service a couple of weeks ago, I had to pick a topic off the cuff, so I said I'd talk about how we can help people who are especially hard hit by the lockdown. In our Prime Minister's words "Be kind".

But eight days ago that story was overtaken by Brian Tamaki running his protest **against** the lockdown

So I've changed the topic a little: **Be kind, most of the time.**

So I'm inviting you to look at not one but three issues

- How can we help other people, through this lockdown?
- What kinds of help do we need ourselves ...
- And what kinds of tough love do we need to show; to Brian Tamaki and others.

First the kind bit:

How can we help others, through this lockdown?

One example from my own experience is to help tradesmen. Marion and I have a guy who mows our lawn every couple of weeks a very helpful guy who is here wet or fine. Thanks to Covid level three he had missed his entire income from us for a couple of rounds. To make it worse, the grass had sprung up ... as high as 20 cm in places.

So we started helping him by getting our shears out and cutting back the worst patches of long grass ourselves.

The next day he came around to do the job, and asked if could give him an extra \$5 because of the longer grass. So we said yes, and we also paid him for the times he hadn't been able to come.

Another group we decided to help is the hospitality industry.

They have been one of the hardest hit, and now they are partly back in business ... So we could help them by eating out more than usual. We had our first drive-through meal a couple of days ago, buying our dinner at KFC ...

We also discovered a very good kitchen that prepares middle eastern meals so you can cook them yourself... they're called Madam Jo Jo. So we're using them more than before. And I'm giving them a plug.

We can help people through social media.

Marion has an exhausting schedule ... up to six zoom meetings a week ... and I've done a couple and I think Zoom is a huge service to the community.

I missed my birthday party a six weeks ago, thanks to Covid... so I organised myself a Zoom birthday party... and invited every relative I could think of. Including people I hadn't seen for several years and they came. Several of them said we should do this more often... **So thank you Zoom and thank you Covid,** for making us more hospitable than before.

Second question: What kind of help could we do with ourselves?

I've been on the receiving end of a lot of help.

Marion's nephew does supermarket shopping for us once a week ... We give him a list on Friday night, and he buys it on the Saturday. It also means we also have a weekly chat with him and his partner, out on our front lawn. So that helps us cope

One of my biggest hassles has been **training to run a half marathon**. In March this year I was enrolled in an 8k, Round the Bays run; But that got cancelled because of Covid. So I thought: no sweat I'll enter the half marathon instead that's 21km, so was an exciting challenge.

But it came badly unstuck over winter. To do 21 ks, I need to be on the road about five hours a week. ... and the atrocious weather often often made that impossible. I got a bad chill from running in the rain, and was out of action for about two weeks. I used to go a gym on the rainy days, but they got shut down for Covid. After two months of this my running got slower. That was very depressing.

But my daughter Karen is also a sporty person, and said she'd do a training run with me on part of the track I have never been on, from Devonport to Northcote.

Now they've postponed the marathon to the end of January

And I'm getting a sense of doom that we'll have another lockdown before January.

So part of me feels like giving up.

I had another small disaster. My dog ate my hearing aid, so I can't hear people very well. I got a replacement one two months ago ... Unfortunately its still sitting in the eye specialist's shop. Thanks to Covid.

I did better with another problem. I've had eye problems for over a year, and it looked like I was going to be unable to drive. But thanks to Green Lane clinic they've been treating me every month or two, right through the lockdowns ... and finally this week I got the all clear.

So I feel vulnerable ... but also grateful for the help coming from many directions

And thirdly – what about situations where tough love is needed?

I don't usually see crime in the street when I walk down the road but did twice in the past few weeks.

Running through Grey Lynn I saw about 10 police cars pulled up on the opposite side of the road. I asked another bystander what it was ... he said a guy's gone crazy with a knife. It appears he was attacking a member of his own household ... and then attacked the police when they intervened.

And just three days ago, I woke up to hear a tow truck a couple of doors away, with one car on its deck and another one being winched onto a platform at the back. I thought: you miserable dogs – until I found that this car had parked right across my neighbour's driveway ... and they were essential workers, so they couldn't go to work without calling the tow truck.

So that's Covid: more people than usual are going crazy; many people are stepping over other people's rights. And the police are busy containing these angry people.

Brian Tamaki is just one of thousands who are under pressure and breaking the rules. But it was still not obvious what should have been done about him.

I supported the police at the start, for not going in in force and breaking up Tamaki's protest. We had seen that approach leading to violence in Sydney, Melbourne and a number of other cities.

And our police took a gentler line. But then a petition got started, saying they should take action.

A day later, it turned out they **had** taken action ... and charged just a couple of people. I thought that was a good answer.

So when the petition reached us I signed it, because I thought the arrests had been well handled.

But when I read the fine print, I saw it was **not** supporting the police, it was condemning them for acting too slowly.

So now I wish I hadn't signed it. And I think I will write a letter to the police and the media congratulating them.

There are other issues where people would be hurt if the authorities were too heavy.

For instance, Maori are one of the groups with a lower number of people getting vaccinated. Others are nervous about vaccination for health reasons.

So I was pleased to discover only the next day that the government did care about people who are opposed to vaccination, and is setting up a number of special programmes to help them, including Maori.

So New Zealand has changed tack, and is putting more of an emphasis on vaccination... An international report this morning listed dozens of countries and found that United Arab Emirates had the highest score, with 95% of their people vaccinated. New Zealand was way down on 67%. We had been overtaken by former disaster areas, the United States and Britain.

But other countries praised us for the turnaround. they said we'd acted wisely by focussing on containment at the start, and now focussing on vaccines.

So where do we fit in personally?

In some cases, New Zealand citizens have taken a lead, changing before the government did, or at the same time.

For instance, Auckland businessmen have been calling for the right to demand that people get vaccinated if they want a job.

Kindergarten workers have called for parents to get vaccinated before their kids are admitted to preschool.... because the children themselves can't get vaccinated.

And others have pushed for the development of a vaccine that's safe for children.

And no sooner had we asked for that, and several of the vaccine manufactures have started producing just that.

I expect that we will now see pressure in the government to get into the queue for these child vaccines early ... and not wait at the bottom of the queue as they did in the past.

I heard an interesting discussion between two churches over how to cope with communion services during lockdown. One denomination said there shouldn't be communion until we are in Level 1. Another said communion is OK in level two, if the food distribution all goes one way ... I presume that means you shouldn't let any wine drip back into the cup. And this was a double problem for union parishes, with two bureaucracies keeping an eye on them.

I'd like to finish with a few comments that show this debate over tough love versus soft love goes back at least 2000 years.

That's the theme of my Bible reading from Matthew's gospel he was telling his church members to protest about lawbreakers ... **but to do it gently....**

1. The first step, according to Matthew ... is to speak to the lawbreaker in person, one on one.... That could be quite a difficult thing to do. I am scared to confront people I think are doing wrong. But Matthew says ... **if your fellow church member accepts your complaint ... you have regained your brother or sister...** that's a very good reason for for complaining gently, but firmly.
2. **However** if the brother doesn't apologise, Matthew ups the ante and... says you should then complain to the lawbreaker again, but this time bring along another two or three witness. He was quoting Jewish law, that a legal complaint needs more than one witness.
3. And if that doesn't work Well Matthew has a three strikes approach: take your protest to the church meeting, and if he doesn't listen to them, **then** treat him like a heathen or a tax collector..

There are several things wrong with this text Matthew was supposed to be quoting Jesus, but in fact there was no Christian church in the time of Jesus; and in fact Jesus was friendly to tax gatherers So it's debatable whether Jesus actually said this. But I still think it was good advice.

And this argument between soft and tough went several more rounds.

Matthew and Luke's gospels have a weird addition that asks who has a divine right to forgive lawbreakers ... and they come up with the answer that when Christians forgive people, they stay forgiven, but other people who don't get their forgiveness from the right church official will go to hell.

This appalling theory still survives in some quarters. Including Brian Tamaki.

To sum up

We are lucky to live in a law-abiding country, where

- most of the citizens are considerate most of the time
- where the police show good judgement most of the time
- and where the government puts its efforts in helpful ways most of the time
- So we can mostly be cheerleaders, or positive critics.
- But at times we too should take a lead, by setting an example of good will common sense.

Meditation / Conversation Starter:-

- How can we help other people, through this lockdown?
- What kinds of help do we need ourselves ...
- And what kinds of tough love do we need to show; to Brian Tamaki and others.