

Love: A Radical Concept (published in the Faith and Reason section of the The Daily Item, 1/17/2026)

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Let me begin with this: Every life lost is a tragedy. Every senseless killing involves two of God's children — the perpetrator and the victim. My heart is deeply saddened for both.

When we moved to this area more than 15 years ago, I met a man whose story changed how I understand forgiveness. He and his wife had devoted themselves to traveling the country advocating for an end to the death penalty — a remarkable calling made even more remarkable by the fact that his own son had been murdered in a drug deal gone wrong. The young man was mistaken for someone else, simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. The killer was caught, tried, and sentenced to life in prison, pending the death penalty.

Some time after conviction, the killer reached out to the father, seeking forgiveness. The father, a man of strong faith, refused for quite a while. He wouldn't return letters. He refused visits. Finally, after multiple attempts, still angry and doubting any sincerity, he responded. He went to see the man who had killed his son.

Fast forward through multiple meetings and parole board hearings: the killer was eventually released. And then something extraordinary happened. The two men — the grieving father and his son's killer — began traveling the country together, speaking about forgiveness, rehabilitation, and ending the death penalty. The father told me he never thought he could forgive someone who killed his child. But he did. And together, they made a difference in countless lives.

I share this story now because of what I've witnessed over the past several weeks. There have been several senseless deaths in the news, and the responses I've seen have been appalling. One pastor told me that when he mentioned one of the deceased by name, he received nasty messages from members of his congregation accusing him of being unpatriotic — among other things I won't dignify here. On social media, opinions and name-calling and nastiness span the spectrum. People try to justify their attacks on neighbors as warranted, both politically and biblically. I find this equally appalling.

Here's what troubles me: all the evil perpetrated against Jesus never brought him to a point of pounding his chest, name-calling, or demeaning his perpetrators. He never condoned killing any neighbor, no matter the offense. Jesus always erred on the side of compassion. And here we are, followers of Jesus, finding it hard to do just that — follow Jesus's example.

Those of us who have been baptized have been baptized in the same waters as Jesus. We are called to stand up and say: if kindness and love for all God's children are offensive, then that's who I am and who I am going to be. Jesus was offensive when he touched lepers, ate with tax collectors, defended the woman caught in adultery, and welcomed Samaritan outsiders. The offense came not from being political — he didn't denounce Tiberius, Pontius Pilate, or Herod — but from taking the call to love all people seriously in a world that would rather we didn't.

"Yet too often, we choose judgment over grief, condemnation from a distance rather than the costly love Jesus modeled. We rush to critique one another's responses, reduce real people to political talking points, forget they have names and families and stories. We're so afraid of appearing weak that we've lost sight of God's justice—which isn't about political sides, but about recognizing that every single person is God's beloved child. "There's something deeply biblical about naming the dead, about bearing witness to a real person, not just an abstract tragedy. Jesus named people — Lazarus, Jairus's daughter, the widow of Nain's son. The prophets named the victims of injustice. So I want to name someone whose death has impacted our country in raw ways this week.

Renee Good was a real person. She had a name. She mattered to God.

This week, her wife, her three children, and her community in Minneapolis lost Renee Good. She was 37 years old—a mother, a poet, a devoted follower of Jesus Christ. Her wife shared that Renee believed "we are here to love each other, care for each other, and keep each other safe and whole." And she lived that belief. When she died, she was doing exactly that — caring for her immigrant neighbors, making waves of love in a world that desperately needs it.

I know we sit in different places politically about what happened and what it means. I know some are angry, some confused, some have strong opinions about the circumstances. Some will say she was standing in the way of justice. But here's what I believe we can all agree on: a mother is gone. A Christian woman who took Jesus's call to love our neighbors seriously — so seriously that she was living it out in the final moments of her life — has died. That is a tragedy that should break all of our hearts, regardless of where we stand on any other question.

We aren't asked to judge her or the person who pulled the trigger or any other responders to this tragedy. We are asked to pray for them all. And as followers of Christ, we need to step up and work for a world where love is greater than hate, where we hold our opinions with humility and seek to see things from others' perspectives.

So, I'm asking you: will you make waves like Jesus? Not waves of anger or hatred or political point-scoring, but waves of radical, self-giving love? Will you welcome the stranger? Will you care for the vulnerable? Will you choose the way of Jesus, even when it's costly, even when it's complicated, even when people misunderstand?

Just love. That's all I'm asking. Love one another as Jesus taught. Love one another because we were baptized in the same wave-making waters as Jesus and thus have the same charge from our Lord: Love one another. Period.