**Love That Has No Fear** **by Rev Suchitra Behera**

**25th October 2026**

**Texts:** Leviticus 19:1–2, 15–18; Matthew 22:34–46

**Theme:** Holy love is costly, practical, and courageous. In the life of Graham Staines and in the work of Tearfund's local church partners, we see what it means to love God wholeheartedly and to love the neighbour whom others reject.

When a lawyer asked Jesus which commandment was greatest, Jesus answered with two commands that belong together: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind," and "Love your neighbour as yourself" (Matthew 22:37–39). These are not separate duties—one religious, one social. They are one way of life. To love God truly is to love the people God loves; to worship sincerely is to act justly, speak truthfully, and show mercy.

Leviticus 19 makes this plain. God calls Israel to be holy because God is holy, but holiness is immediately expressed through justice: fair judgement, honesty, care for the deaf and blind, protection for workers, and love for the neighbour. Holiness is not only what happens in church; it is how we treat the person nobody else wants to touch.

**Justice for the vulnerable**

Leviticus 19:15 forbids partiality in both directions: we must not favour the rich and powerful, nor make judgements simply because someone is poor. God calls his people to truth, fairness, and dignity. The surrounding verses speak of protecting hired workers, refusing to insult the deaf, and not placing stumbling blocks before the blind. God sees those whom society overlooks and hears those whom others silence.

Then comes the command: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the LORD" (Leviticus 19:18). God attaches his own name to the command. How we treat our neighbour is part of our reverence for God.

**Jesus and costly mission**

In Matthew 22, Jesus affirms that all the Law and the Prophets depend on love of God and neighbour. He then asks, "What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?" Jesus is David's son, yet also David's Lord. He is not merely a moral teacher; he is the Lord who embodies God's holy love.

Jesus touched lepers, welcomed the excluded, healed the sick, defended the powerless, forgave sinners, and gave his life for the world. His mission was spiritual and practical: he proclaimed God's kingdom while restoring dignity, health, relationships, and hope. The Christian mission must hold these

together—the good news of Jesus, made visible through compassionate action.

**Graham Staines: love in action**

Graham Staines, an Australian missionary, went to India in 1965 and served for more than three decades among tribal communities in Mayurbhanj, Odisha. His ministry centred on people affected by leprosy, who faced not only illness but stigma, fear, and exclusion. He helped establish and lead the Mayurbhanj Leprosy Home in Baripada, cared for patients, and supported their rehabilitation and reintegration into community life.

Graham also encouraged self-reliance, teaching skills such as making mats and baskets from sabai grass and tree leaves, and translating the New Testament into the language of the Ho people, an indigenous tribal community.

Here was Leviticus 19 in human form: he did not treat poor or excluded people as objects of pity but as neighbours with names, families, gifts, and dignity.

**Local churches as agents of hope**

Such love becomes sustainable when local churches and communities are equipped to serve their own neighbours. Tearfund works through local churches and Christian partners in vulnerable communities, helping them identify needs,

mobilise local resources, and lead transformation. It moves communities from a relief mentality to a resource mentality.

This matters because local churches are often closest to the pain of their people. They know the widow without food, the child unable to attend school, the family displaced by flood, and the person excluded by society. Tearfund's work in Asia includes disaster response, community transformation, protection of women and children, and advocacy for justice and accountable public spending. It supports communities across 16 Asian countries, including Bangladesh, Nepal, India, Indonesia, and Cambodia.

In Bangladesh, partners work with flood-prone communities to strengthen livelihoods, improve water and sanitation, and prepare for disasters. The Churches in Bangladesh have mobilised local churches to diversify crops, harvest rainwater, plant trees, and train volunteers in disaster preparedness. These are modern expressions of Leviticus 19: protecting the vulnerable, pursuing justice, and loving neighbours in practical ways.

**Costly love**

On 23 January 1999, Graham Staines and his two young sons, Philip and Timothy, were killed in Manoharpur, Odisha. This was a terrible act of violence and injustice, not a story to be romanticised. Yet Graham's widow, Gladys, became a profound

witness to forgiveness and continued service, showing that the love of Christ is stronger than hatred.

Christian mission is not always safe, easy, or applauded. But it is not mainly about dramatic sacrifice. Most mission is ordinary and faithful: visiting the sick, welcoming the stranger, teaching a child, supporting a family, speaking truth when it is unpopular, and refusing to abandon people when others walk away. Graham's greatness lay not only in how he died but also in decades of patient service among people whom many considered untouchable.

**What this means for us**

We may not be called to Odisha, Bangladesh, or Nepal, but every baptized Christian is called to mission.

- **See the neighbour others avoid:** the homeless person, asylum seeker, disabled person, lonely older person, young person in addiction, or family living in fear.
- **Let worship become justice:** if we sing of God's love on Sunday but ignore injustice on Monday, our worship is incomplete.
- **Serve with dignity, not pity:** help people use their own gifts and rebuild their lives.
- **Support mission practically:** pray, give, learn, and encourage our churches to stand with Christian partners serving vulnerable communities.

- **Hold word and deed together:** share the hope of Christ while feeding, visiting, healing, teaching, advocating, and welcoming.

**Conclusion**

Twice in today's readings, God gives the reason for holy love: "I am the LORD." Jesus declares that love of God and neighbour is the foundation of all God's law. May we be a church with the same holy love—courageous in justice, tender in mercy, faithful in prayer, and willing to cross every boundary of fear, prejudice, and convenience.

May our love for God be seen in our love for our neighbours, near and far—especially those the world calls unlovely, unwanted, or beyond hope. Amen.