

“Love is the Answer”

One of my favorite British comedy teams is Mitchell and Webb. They also take awkward situations to the extreme of awkwardness. For example there is the waiter who berates his customers for their lack of food and wine expertise or the haberdasher who ridicules the customer’s suit. Then there is my favorite – the Bad Vicar.

In this situation a couple comes into his church just to “Pop in and say ‘hi.’” The vicar responds, “Who did you think you were going to say ‘hi’ to, the Lord your God, because I don’t think they have lived lives worthy of [God’s] attention.” He goes on to ridicule their curiosity, their lifestyle, and their “internet-assembled” philosophy. The encounter ends as he chases them out of the church finally saying, “At least leave a quid for the upkeep.”¹ Only insiders are allowed.

So it seems with today’s Gospel reading. Bartemeus a blind beggar cries out “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”² The mercy he wants is healing from Jesus. Sadly, when Bartemeus cries out to Jesus those around him tell the beggar to shut up. It is only when Jesus beckons the man that the crowd turns obsequious and urges Bartemeus to get up and go to Jesus.

You will remember that the crowd, including the disciples, has acted this way in the past when they tried to keep children away from Jesus. The insiders want to keep the outsiders outside. They wanted to keep the doors closed. This was their messiah not anyone else’s. The thought was that there was only so much Jesus to go around so keeping him to themselves was paramount.

What this group failed to understand about Jesus was his message of the abundance of God’s love. Jesus encourages us to welcome others especially strangers and to love them even if they are enemies. Jesus encourages us not to fear. One source of fear is the perception that there is not enough to go around. Therefore, we must have to stop others from getting inside because they will take away what we need. Jesus a poor beggar himself preached abundant life in God. Just as God provides for the birds of the air and the lilies of the field, God, who numbers the hairs of our head, will provide for us.

This seems incomprehensible when we are told day in and day out, that we need another thing to make our life perfect. Yet this idea of scarcity is what leads to violence. I must stop the other so that they won’t threaten what I need or want. So some send bombs to perceived threats and others kill people in the grocery store or at worship all out of fear.

The solution to violence is not more violence or hatred or fear. The solution is love. We, you and me, have to teach love and show love not just among our closed inside group here at Emmanuel or Middleburg, but everywhere. We have to sow the seeds of love everywhere we go. We have to show kindness to everyone we encounter especially mean, angry, and hurtful people. They need it most.

St. Paul said it best in his first letter to the Corinthians. Most of us know the passage and some can probably quote it by heart. We often read this passage at weddings equating the love that Paul is writing about with the romantic love of a

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Ndkz7HTic8>

² Mark 10:46-52

married couple. There is nothing wrong with that, except perhaps that it isolates Paul's commandment to love everyone within the couple. The love that Paul is talking about is much more than romance. Paul is talking about LOVE in all caps. Paul is sharing a way of life that Jesus calls us to every day with every person, not just married couples.

Listen to each word as if you have never been heard it before. Listen to each word as if your life depended on it.

"If I speak in tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

"Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in the wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends."³

Love everyone, no exceptions. As Jeremiah said let us write this on our hearts. As followers of Jesus we are called to live out of a center of love, not fear, not blame, not ego, not jealousy, not envy, but love alone. This kind of love is not sappy, pop song, greeting card kind of love. It is harder than that. But Jesus showed us how to love this way in how he lived. He allowed everyone even lepers, real and figurative, to come to him and touch him. He touched them and healed them. He healed and loved all sorts of people, even his people's oppressors and his very killers.

Loving so abundantly is a struggle, because society tells us it is unsafe and unwise. We have a choice. We can follow the advice of other flawed humans or we can follow God and Jesus Christ? Our presence here today indicates that we have chosen to follow Jesus. In the process we will fail. We will not always love as we want to. The clamor of the world will sometimes distract us from our calling to love all. But there is no other answer to the violence that fills our world. Actively loving every single person we meet will change us and will change them. It arrests our violence and theirs before it happens. It is our only hope. It is what Jesus called us to do. It is what God wants us to do. It is what this broken and ailing world needs us to do.

³ 1 Corinthians 13:1-8a