

“The Power of Love”

The Rev Drew Willard
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Isaiah 53:4-12

Mark 10:35-45

*‘He was wounded and crushed because of our sins;
by taking our punishment, he made us completely well.
All of us were like sheep that had wandered off.’*

Isaiah 53:5-6a

Let us pray... O God,
In the midst of life’s struggles,
may people at least agree on the problem if not the solution.
And may your love for the sake of all people, prevail in the process.

Amen

No doubt many of you are following the Presidential campaign debates
and you are keeping score for how well your favorite candidate is doing
or still just trying to make up your mind.

It certainly has been an exciting race as you might expect it would be
as things are beginning to draw to a close
with the final debate tomorrow night,
just two weeks before Election Day.

With the kinds of challenges that an American president must face these days
like decisions which can literally mean life or death,
the daily scrutiny of TV pundits parsing every pitiful misstep
while impugning their characters with pathetic poignancy,
let alone enduring the rigors of the campaign trail where they have to get out
among the public to make the case that they are the best candidate –
who in their right mind would even want this job?

Have you ever noticed that – even after a successful campaign,
four years later, every president gets gray hair.
And though you would think that after “the American people have spoken”,
our leaders would knuckle down and get to work,
but have you noticed that – for many years now,
campaigns seems to go on passed the election
as two opposing views on the American way of life wrestle for power –
not to rest until one or the other is utterly defeated.

It’s obvious in today’s lesson that Jesus is no stranger to power struggles–
as he and his disciples make their way to Jerusalem
while the disciples struggle to make sense of what is ahead.

Willard, p.2

In the verses preceding our Gospel lesson,
Jesus has just told them again about what he must face...

*And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem,
and Jesus was walking ahead of them;
and they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid.*

*And taking the twelve again,
he began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying,
"Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem;
and the Son of man will be delivered
to the chief priests and the scribes,
and they will condemn him to death,
and deliver him to the Gentiles;
and they will mock him, and spit upon him,
and scourge him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise."*

Mark 10:32-34

Jesus had said this to them before –
but the disciples seem to be practicing selective hearing,
in that they understand Jesus thinks he will die
and perhaps they all will, too.

However, they take into account that they may actually survive
and would have to organize to keep their movement going.

Earlier, they argued about who would then lead them –
as in, ‘Who among them is the greatest?’

And this is also the context for what follows
when James and John ask him about where *they* stand in these events –
or rather where they would like to sit
in positions of power when Jesus is in his ‘glory’ –
‘glory’ being their vague idea of ‘Heaven’.

Heaven or not, the other disciples are scandalized by the brothers bold power grab
and they vocally protest.

And Jesus calms them all down, pointing out that
the world as they know it was being run – for the time being,
by the Romans whom they called the Gentiles –

And the Romans were anything but gentle or genteel
as to how they treated people under their control.

Jesus said it shouldn’t be the same with them –
or with us for that matter as a Christian community.

Willard, p.3

And Jesus patiently repeated his teachings for a new way of doing business
by being as innocent as children and as humble as slaves.

If it sounds like a recipe for disaster, that's because it is –
from the perspective of a winner-take-all approach to life,
but not if the goal is also how you get there.

Jesus was shrewd and tough with his opponents,
uncompromising and focused, even scathingly humorous,
but love or loving-kindness was always at work in what he said or did.
Ultimately, he would comply with the example set forth six centuries before
in the Book of Isaiah which describes the Servant of God
as a suffering Messiah.

There are four Servant songs – also called the Servant poems in Isaiah
and they present the image of someone who is innocent,
yet accused under the pretense of justice
to be the scapegoat for a society that is unaware of its injustice.

Following this example, Jesus has served to expose the cycle
of naming, blaming, and shaming that people are prone to do.

And in so doing, he has saved us all by showing us a better way –
to love and forgive.

This is not to say anything goes –for there still needs to be discernment as to
what is appropriate and inappropriate,
what is essentially human and what is inhuman.

But we must work to dismantle the legitimacy of violence
as a way of dealing with enemies – but how?

By loving our enemies, we work creatively to make their violence irrelevant
because we won't let it deflect us from the goal of Beloved Community.

And that goal is for God's Kingdom to be here on Earth as it is in Heaven –
a social reality of justice and an authentic life of peace.

This is represented by what my Church History professor,
John Payne of Lancaster Theological Seminary once said, such that
“The Roman Empire was not conquered by Christianity.
The Roman Empire crumbled around Christianity.”

Anything we read about in the news media,
no doubt had already happened back then in some form or fashion –
there was nothing new under the sun even by Jesus' time.

The transformation of the world has happened and continues to happen –
though in increments.

Willard, p.4

You can bet the Servants of God will continue to suffer in the process,
but we could make it easier for those servants in our midst
so they don't have to suffer so much.

Besides doing our part to pitch in and serve, too,
we can just make a point to show love and forgiveness to one another
and find a shortcut to that elusive Kingdom.

One of our church members brought an idea back from their church up north
which that congregation uses as a guide for how they treat one other
according to the Golden Rule of the Great Commandment.

This is called the Danville Covenant, and it was written in 2009:

*God has called us together as a living congregation.
We follow the teachings of Jesus Christ,
who commands us to "love your neighbor as yourself."
We desire to be a vibrantly healthy and compassionate
Christian community.
To this end, we covenant together to make every effort
to relate to each other in the following ways:*

*We will be respectful of each other
By listening well,
By going with any concern directly to the appropriate person,
By having a civil demeanor, ... a kind heart,
...and honoring each other in appropriate ways.*

*We will be accepting of each other
By tolerating differences, ... showing concern for feelings,
and... seeking [to understand] each other's position.*

*We will be honest with each other
By being open, and ...being direct*

*We will be considerate of each other
By showing humility, ...being gentle,
...protecting personal information,
and ... protecting each other's reputation*

And this is how they endeavor to treat each other as a congregation
and in their encounters with 'the wider world'.

Willard, p.5

The power of love is not found in forcing others to do one's will,
but it is plain to see in the unwillingness
to accept being treated less than who you are
or to accept others being treated that way, either.

The power of love can change the world – even Empires,
when we choose to change ourselves and how we treat one another.

And according to singer Huey Lewis,

*The power of love [can] change a hawk to a little white dove,
More than a feeling that's the power of love.*

Amen

*Our lesson from Isaiah 53:4-12 is part of
the 4th Song of the Suffering Servant found in the Book of Isaiah.
This passage describes not only the character and mission of the Servant
but also ultimate achievement and reward...*

He suffered and endured great pain for us,
but we thought his suffering was punishment from God.
He was wounded and crushed because of our sins;
by taking our punishment, he made us completely well.
All of us were like sheep that had wandered off.
We had each gone our own way,
but the Lord gave him the punishment we deserved.
He was painfully abused,
but he did not complain.
He was silent like a lamb being led to the butcher,
as quiet as a sheep having its wool cut off.
He was condemned to death without a fair trial.
Who could have imagined what would happen to him?
His life was taken away because of the sinful things
my people had done.
He wasn't dishonest or violent,
but he was buried in a tomb of cruel and rich people.
The Lord decided his servant would suffer as a sacrifice
to take away the sin and guilt of others.
Now the servant will live to see his own descendants.
He did everything the Lord had planned.
By suffering,
the servant will learn the true meaning of obeying the Lord.
Although he is innocent,
he will take the punishment for the sins of others,
so that many of them will no longer be guilty.
The Lord will reward him with honor and power
for sacrificing his life.
Others thought he was a sinner,
but he suffered for our sins and asked God to forgive us.

Mark 10:35-45

James and John, the Zebedeeson brothers, came over to Jesus
and asked him,

“Rabbi, we want you to do something for us.”

And he said,

“What do you want me to do for you?”

And they said,

“Grant that we may sit on your right and on your left in your glory.”

But Jesus said to them,

“You don’t know what you are asking.

Are you able to drink the cup that I will have to drink?

Or go through the kind of baptism I will be baptized with?

They said,

“We can!”

And Jesus said to them,

“The cup I drink you will drink

and the baptism I will go through, you will go through, too.

Yet to sit on my right or left is not for me to grant,

but for those for whom that has been prepared.”

And overhearing this,

the other ten disciples were angry with James and John.

Then calling them together, Jesus said to them,

“Those with a reputation as rulers among the Gentiles,
lord it over them.

And the greatest among them doesn’t hesitate
to exercise their authority over them.

But it shouldn’t be that way among you.

Instead, whoever wants to be greatest among you must be your servant
and whoever wants to be Number One must be slave to all.

For even the Son of Man, the True Heir of Humanity,
does not come to be served, but to serve,

even to die as a ransom for the sake of many.”

Mark 10:35-45

[35] And James and John, the sons of Zeb'edee, came forward to him, and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you."

[36] And he said to them, "What do you want me to do for you?"

[37] And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory."

[38] But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?"

[39] And they said to him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized;

[40] but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."

[41] And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John.

[42] And Jesus called them to him and said to them, "You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them.

[43] But it shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant,

[44] and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.

[45] For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."