
The Love that Forgives

A sermon by CanonCarolynne Williams
Proper 22 – Year A

“Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend. We never get rid of an enemy by meeting hate with hate. By its very nature, hate destroys and tears down; by its very nature, love creates and builds up. Love transforms with redemptive power.” —Martin Luther King, Jr., *Strength To Love*

Dr. King said these words in his eulogy for the four little girls that were murdered as a result of a bomb exploding in the First Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, over 50 years ago. These girls were on their way to Sunday School. He said these words:

“Life is hard, at times as hard as crucible steel. It has its bleak and difficult moments. Like the ever-flowing waters of the river, life has its moments of drought and its moments of flood ... If one will hold on, he will discover that God walks with him ... God is able to lift you from the fatigue of despair to the buoyancy of hope, and transform dark and desolate valleys into sunlit paths of inner peace.” *Death of a King*, Tavis Smiley with David Ritz, pg. 48

That eulogy was one of the few times that Dr. King was seen weeping openly in public.

The rhythms of life and living can throw humanity off balance at any given moment. We are living in an era of great dissonance, of dramatic highs and lows, with lives that move at a pace and intensity impossible, it seems, at any other time in history. One of the keys to finding balance, one of the rules of living in this era, especially when we cannot control what happens, but we can influence our stories, influence our perceptions and physiology, according to some experts, is to find balance in a firm foundation. This is key to understanding and managing stress to your and my advantage.

We have the story of the people of Exodus and the role of Moses leading the people mediating between God and the people during ancient biblical times.

Today in postmodern times we have the community of saints coming together in prayer, corporate and individual prayer, to glorify God and to acknowledge the love that is upon us and around us and through this community and the worldwide community of Christians.

Through the times of suffering and unexplainable pain, either personal pain or pain cast upon us, we move within grace and walk within the boundaries of our faith.

The foundation in which we have our being to worship, to praise God and to understand, as best we can, with our finite minds and questioning hearts, permits us to ask the question, what is next? What on this earth is next?

God is indeed Holy mystery and enunciates demand. During ancient biblical times, we are reminded through scripture of the mode of living of the people of Israel and their human conflicts. They lived in a world filled with options of their times, depending upon there being a place of freedom or a place of enslavement.

Today, we are reminded of living and being keenly aware of the factions of humanity for us. Those who trust in their gods

and those who are committed to being in union with one another as Christians are experiencing some of the same. All experiences being within the appropriate context.

In the Christian tradition, baptism is the dramatic form of making a God choice. Where one is sealed and marked as Christ's own forever, through the presence of the Holy Spirit. The presence of the Holy Spirit holds us through our suffering and our daily living. It is the foundation of which we as Christians who trust and believe as we grow spiritually and learn to love again and again, belong to God. In loving God, we are called upon to do the impossible more than we may want to acknowledge.

The impossible is to love as God loves us. Only through our relationship with God can any of us do what we are demanded to do.

For me it is a complete struggle. Not every day. Not every month. Certainly not every moment. But in order for me to have a part of my story to be centered in God and not myself first, but God first, I attempt to be open, as you do, to be open to the presence of the love of others. This makes room in our hearts for healing. Where there is no healing or no consideration of the possibility of healing of our infirmities, we succumb to the desires of our heart. A heart that has been hardened is a breeding ground for hatred, non-resolution and brokenness.

The church, all Christian people, express and make concrete for others the care of God for God's creation. How? On a simplistic level: being present for those in need. Secondly, we all are in need of something that the church offers. Usually that "something" represents filling a need in our lives that we would otherwise be void of. True security comes from that which is given to us freely from the cross. Thirdly, we are to be a spiritual community. Our response to the questions of life and living, as a Christian, call upon each of us and the community to assert the essential value of life because it is grounded in God. Fourth, we are to continue to be a community who serves those in need. The spirit calls for us to share in God's eternal life and promise.

As we live this out we will be enabled through the presence of the Holy Spirit within us to forgive as God forgives us. We will be enabled to learn to love and eventually we will love with a sense of forgiveness of ourselves and others.

Amen.