

Homily – Servant of All

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May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O GOD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

In a variety of ways today's readings come together as a template for living; how to be true disciples of Jesus. He spent three years training his 12 disciples and as we see in today's gospel, they seem to be slow learners. As they are passing through Galilee Jesus tells them that he will be betrayed into human hands, be killed, and three days later rise again, AND they are arguing over who is the greatest among them? Jesus calls them on it and turns things upside down with "*Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.*"

At another time he had given us the two Great Commandments: Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. And love your neighbor as yourself.

Our job is to be really good at loving, both God and everyone else. It should be easy but in reality, it's not.

A while ago a quote from Saint Augustine came to my attention that made me stop and think, "Love God and do what you will." It sounds great, but wait – if we really love God, we strive to do only that which God would have us do. It is not permission to be unloving toward our neighbor.

Feed the hungry, clothe the naked, comfort the afflicted, visit the prisoner, make sure everyone has enough, and love **all, all** our neighbors. Don't succumb to the false gods that lure us - such as social status, power, and wealth. Don't allow differences stop us from loving neighbors who disagree with us or differ from us in some other way. And because we are human; we will most likely fail more often than we like.

In his letter James exhorts us to listen to the wisdom within our souls – the wisdom that brings to the surface our peaceable, gentle, yielding selves. Loving as God wants us to love requires us to free these characteristics or feelings because we need to be at peace so that we can be peacemakers.

Currently, different perspectives or visions of what kind of society we want or should be is a significant obstacle to our own peace and that of our country. The American Buddhist, Pema Chödrön, teaches that healing and peace begin within us.

She says that "War begins when we harden our hearts, and we harden them easily - in minor ways and then in quite serious, major ways, such as hatred and prejudice – whenever we feel uncomfortable." Here at St. Barnabas we've talked about praying for our enemies and how difficult that can be. Chödrön's basic message is that "to the degree that each of us is dedicated to wanting there to be peace in the world, then we have to take responsibility when our own hearts and minds harden and close. First the heart closes, then the mind becomes hardened into a view, then you can justify your hatred of another human being because of what they

represent and what they say and do. Allowing the hardened thoughts to live in our hearts perpetuates the divisions and that makes moving forward from a stance of love, the only way forward. Chödrön shares a story about an inmate named Jarvis to illustrate this:

Many of the prison guards in San Quentin are very kind and helpful, but some of them get mean and unreasonable and take their frustrations out on the prisoners. One day there had been plenty of that happening and tempers were short. An inmate came up to Jarvis in the yard and asked, "Is it your Buddhism that keeps you so calm, Jarvis? How can you stand it when these guards are giving you such shit?"

And Jarvis said, "Oh, it has nothing to do with Buddhism. I just think if I retaliate, they'll go home and beat their kids. I don't want that to happen to any of those little kids." The other man got it completely. **Our empathy and wisdom begin to come forward when we're not clouded by our rigid views or closed heart.**

Empathy and sincerely putting oneself in another's shoes can't help but soften the heart, right?

The next time you feel angry toward someone, stop and envision the edges of your heart soften toward that person.

Today we are 44 days from election day. No matter which outcome you are hoping for, we are all called to set aside our righteousness and to love all our neighbors. That will be very difficult for many and yet, that is what a disciple of Jesus will strive to do.

Aside from urging everyone to be sure they vote, I invite you to be diligent in your prayer practice and ask God's help to love as generously as God loves. If you don't have one, start with something simple that you are comfortable with. An easy suggestion is to spend ten minutes sitting quietly and allowing God to fill your heart and mind. If need be, ask someone to help you. I strongly believe in the power of prayer and know in my heart that God hears us when we pray.

Since we started the Season of Peace at the beginning of the year, we have had monthly Peace Prayer meetings here at Saint Barnabas. The next one is on Saturday, September 28th at 1 pm. All are welcome.

There will also be an offering from the Diocesan Social Justice Committee. You are invited to join in a short on-line prayer service via Zoom for the election on Thursdays at 1pm starting October 10. This was just planned so we will be sure to get the information in the Weekly-e and the Bulletin next week.

Now I want to go back to the beginning – who is the greatest? Again the answer from Jesus is the opposite of what many would expect and beautifully described in this closing poem that also invites all of us to be among the greatest.

Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.

—Mark 9.35

Not subservient, not inferior to others,
but helpful, in support, in service.
You're not indentured or obligated;
you serve in love that is yours to give.
Your task today is to serve others—
not necessarily to please them,
not to save them or “fix” them,
but to offer grace, to bless them,
to set before them wholeness of life,
to open doors that set them free,
to speak a word that heals
and does not dishonor them.
Your task today is not to use or conquer others,
but to offer what love or joy you can
in service to their new life.

Today, for everyone you meet,
God is the chef of grace
and you are their server.