

## **love is happy with the truth**

Matthew 7:13-14

February 5, 2017

So, what is it that is on everybody's mind today? I'll give you a hint. It's not a football game.

I am used to over-the-top Super Bowl hype, all Super Bowl, all the time, news coverage of every little detail. What is Tom Brady eating for breakfast on the big day? What does Matt Ryan's high school girl friend remember about him? But this time around, not so much, not so much media attention relatively speaking. Because?

Because what's on everybody's mind is the first two weeks of an unprecedented new administration. It is unprecedented because for the first time in our history, we elected a president with no previous experience in either government or the military. Presumably, we elected him for that very reason: to do things differently, to shake up the system, to get things done, and that's what we got.

It's not business as usual, the system and the nation are in an uproar, and, for better or worse, things are getting done. Already there have been a dizzying array of pronouncements and executive orders: withdrawing from trade agreements, freezing government regulations, limiting family planning spending, clearing the way for the Keystone XL and Dakota Access pipelines and revoking water quality protection orders, banning entry to immigrants and refugees from seven primarily Muslim nations.

It is unprecedented, not so much for the particular policies this administration is promoting, but for the way it is going about it. Even his supporters would agree that the new president's style is blunt and brash and bullying. He is no diplomat, choosing his words carefully, rather he shoots from the hip, he says what's on his mind, he's not too afraid to goad old enemies or to make new ones. And so the nation is in an uproar and the rest of the world isn't sure what to think. It is unprecedented, meaning for some, unprecedented possibility, but for others, unprecedented peril.

That is what is on everybody's mind today. And that is why we're talking about it in church, because we are here to let the light of God shine on us and through us and show us how to live. Where? Show us how to live where? Here. Here in the midst of the world in which we find ourselves.

Or do we think the word of God has nothing to do with real life, nothing to do with the things that most affect us and our neighbors? Or do we think God cares nothing about the decisions that directly impact, for better or for worse, the welfare of both people and earth, all that God has created?

What do you suppose God's mind is on today? A football game? We have something to say today, because God has something to say today.

Is God partisan? No. Is God political? Yes. God is love and love is political. Love is political because love is about more, so much more, than feelings, so much more than sweet thoughts or kind words or a gentle demeanor. Love acts. Love invests itself. Love takes risks and makes sacrifices. Love speaks out and acts up and does all it can for the benefit of the beloved. God loved the world so much that he ...?

God loves the world so much that he ... So much that he speaks to us the truth, the truth that shapes us and guides us and sets us free, the truth that does not remain mere words, but only becomes true as it is embodied, in Jesus, and in us.

“Love is not happy with evil, but is happy with the truth.” Love speaks the truth. Love desires the truth. Love is happy, only happy, with the truth. And what is the truth?

Listen again: “Love is not happy with evil, but is happy with the truth.” Which means that truth’s opposite is evil. The opposite of truth is not falsehood, but evil. But evil is a way, a way of being, a way of being in the world, a way of relating to the world. So truth is a way, not a static precept, but a dynamic way, a way of being, a way of being in the world, a way of relating to the world that is the opposite of the way evil relates to the world.

What is that way? What is the way of truth? Jesus tells us: “Go in through the narrow gate, because the gate to hell is wide and the road (the way) that leads to it is easy, and there are many who travel it.” The way, the way of truth, is narrow, not easy to find, and not many people are going that way.

Which means that if we have lots of company, if we are easily moving along with the flow, if we find ourselves comfortably and happily going where pretty much everybody else is going, we are well on our way ... to hell! Seriously!

Followers of Jesus are like Jesus: out of step, non-conforming, countercultural, different. If we follow Jesus’ way, we may be thinking about the same things, but never in the same way. We don’t think about winning and losing. We don’t think in terms of partisanship or power. We don’t think about what we need or want. It’s not about self-preservation or self-aggrandizement or making our own country great, whatever that might mean. It’s about love. It’s about truth. It’s about life.

“The gate to hell is wide,” Jesus said, “but the gate to life is narrow.” So the opposite of hell is? The opposite of hell is not heaven, but life! The narrow way is the way to life and to lose life is ... hell. So the way of truth, the way of love, Jesus’ way, is always about life, about finding and preserving and celebrating life. Whose life? You know whose life!

I came across a blog post this week written by Jenny Simmons. Jenny Simmons was the lead singer in the Christian band, “Addison Road.” Some of you may remember an Addison Road song I played for you years back, “What Do I Know of Holy?”

*I made you promises a thousand times.  
I've tried to hear from heaven,  
but I talked the whole time.  
I think I made you too small.  
I never feared you at all, no ...  
If you touched my face, would I know you,  
Looked into my eyes, could I behold you?*

*What do I know of you who spoke me into motion?  
Where have I even stood  
but the shore along your ocean?  
Are you fire? Are you fury?  
Are you sacred? Are you beautiful?  
What do I know of holy?*

Addison Road is now disbanded, but Jenny has done solo projects and she writes, recently publishing a book entitled, "Made Well: finding WHOLENESS in the EVERYDAY SACRED Moments." And she is a new mother.

Last Wednesday, she posted this on her website ...

*Tonight we are taking Annie to her first peaceful rally to stand alongside the Refugee and Immigrant community of Nashville. This is why.*

*I gave birth to our daughter, Lucy, in October at Vanderbilt hospital in Nashville, Tennessee. Nothing went as planned and I've never felt more physically traumatized. That is another story, for another day. When I think back to my five day stay at the hospital there are only a handful of redemptive moments that come to mind. My nurse Miriam is one of them.*

*I've never been treated with as much compassionate love and kindness as I was by Miriam. I've also never been pushed harder. Twenty-four hours after my c-section, when I still felt delirious from the drugs and the pain of the epidural lingered in my back, she asked me if I had walked yet. 'Walked? I can't even urinate on my own,' I thought. My face must have conveyed my fears.*

*"Get up," she said with the authority of a mother who means business, "You have to walk. You have to take a few steps. I'll help you. But you must get up. Let's go."*

*This is how I started walking and also how I started using the bathroom again.*

*"I need to take this catheter out of you, but your mind is not letting me. Your mind is not telling your bladder to go to the bathroom. And that is not good for you. I need you to tell yourself you must get up and go to the bathroom. I will help you. Let's go."*

*She patiently stood by my bed as tears rolled down my face and helped me stand. She held my arm as I inched my way to the bathroom, then she took off my underwear for me when I could not take them off for myself.*

*Her blend of humble love and forceful mothering were my lifelines to healing.*

*When it was time to leave the hospital, I cried.*

*I had never before been so intimately cared for by a nurse. She had become a small part of me, a part of my story. I couldn't imagine not taking her home with me.*

*Miriam is a Muslim, Somali immigrant.*

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*We will bring Annie to the Tennessee Immigrant and Refugees Rights Coalition Vigil and Rally tonight to show our support for the immigrants and refugees calling Nashville home. We will go out of honor and deep gratitude for all the Miriam's in our community.*

*This is not political. It's personal.*

*It's not Republican, Democrat, Independent, or Libertarian. It's not left wing or right wing or any wing.*

*It's the way of Jesus. The one who taught us to love the orphan, widow, alien, stranger, sinner. The one who taught us to love our neighbors as ourselves ...*

It's not partisan. It's not left wing, right wing. It's not about ideology or power or having our own way. It's not about getting the best of our enemies. That's what everybody does. That's the way everybody does it. And that's the road to hell! No, it's the way of Jesus. It's personal. It's about love. It's about the way of love.

That's why Jenny and Ryan took their infant daughter to a rally in Nashville, and that's why I am going this afternoon to a rally in Cedar Falls ... for the sake of my neighbors.