
LOVE IS LOVE IS LOVE IS LOVE IS LOVE IS...

A sermon preached by the Reverend Dr. Stephanie J. Nagley at St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Bethesda on

June 19, 2016.

<https://www.facebook.com/stlukesbethesda/>

The second reading today was the sonnet composed by Lin-Manuel Miranda offered as his acceptance speech at the Tony Awards last Sunday night. It was a profound and moving response to the horrible tragedy in Orlando that had occurred early that Sunday morning.

...nothing here is promised, not one day

*We live through times when hate and fear seem stronger
We rise and fall and light from dying embers*

*And love is love
Cannot be killed or swept aside,
Now fill the world with music love and pride. (Lin-Manuel Miranda)*

The following day in the staff meeting Jessica and Sarah asked me what tone I would like to set for our worship services today and I said “defiant”. Defiant love is Miranda’s sonnet.

Defiant love breaks open our hearts and delivers the most astonishing gifts of creativity. And so it wasn’t a surprise that two hours after our staff meeting Sarah Horick, our Minister of Music, sent me a composition putting the words of Lin-Manuel Miranda’s sonnet to music for this morning. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3T3dcZ4-2MY>

Love isn’t an emotion. Love is a verb. Love is a commitment. Love is what we are called to be and do as the people of God.

At the Wednesday noon service someone challenged me when I offered a similar version of this sermon in the aftermath of Orlando. He countered, “So, we should just go to ISIL and say ‘come on over’ we love you”.

That’s not love.

Love is not a free pass on bad and evil behaviors.

Real love is clear about what is acceptable and not acceptable in our world.

Love is not soft and sentimental. Love is defiant.

Real love demands our best efforts.

Real love demands a commitment to justice and peace.

Real love is what called Elijah out of the cave. Elijah is in the cave because he's afraid and he's given up on trying one day to make a difference in his corner of the world. But God won't let him hide. God doesn't say, "there, there, poor Elijah". God calls him out and tells him to get going. That is love.

When Jesus encounters the man in the cave driven mad by the perverted ways of the world, the ways of the Roman empire, the ways of society that have marginalized him and put all their demons on him, Jesus doesn't say, "there, there". Jesus calls out all those demons, he calls out hatred, malice, bigotry, prejudice, greed, fear, injustice and the of our human condition are cast into the swine who run into the lake and drown.

It's not a pretty story. Love is not sentimental. Love is fierce. Love is defiant.

Jesus calls the man out and tells him to get up and go back to his neighborhood and tell them what love has done.

This is the God we give our hearts. This God is not sentimental. This God demands our best and demands that we give our best and our best is a fierce and defiant commitment to love.

God is calling us out of the cave. God is calling us out and demanding that we respond to the violence around us with fierce and defiant love.

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We cannot live with tragedies like Orlando as if those tragedies are the new normal.

We cannot accept that a moment of silence is enough.

We cannot remain silent or hide in the presence of the evil.

We may think that we can do nothing to stop ISIL or Boko Haram or some other horror that defies imagination but that's not true.

Orlando, Charleston, Roseburg, Oregon, Sandy Hook....

So many tragedies we can't even remember their names.

This is more than about gun control. What faces us is bigger and more far reaching than just gun control. Yes, that is part of the response but that is not all of it.

What bedevils us is complicated. As one writer said, reflecting on Orlando and the death of Jo Cox, the minister of Parliament that followed, “It is not possible to separate the strands of emotion, justification, madness, calculation, reason and fanaticism that can exist in a single human brain. But neither is it possible to separate the human brain from its environment. And the environment is toxic”.¹

What challenges us to find our better selves and act for a better tomorrow is complicated.

What matters is how we show up as a people of God.

As Mother Theresa said, “Not all of us can do great things, but we can do small things with great love”.

And every small thing we do matters.

Love is a commitment to demanding the best from each of us and it begins in our own backyard.

Love is looking at each other instead of looking at our phones.

Love is acknowledging the presence of the person you walk by on the sidewalk, or who checks you out at the store, but that’s not all.

Love also demands that someone looks at us. Love doesn’t let the other off the hook.

Love is listens to the other side and demands the same.

Love demands that we tell each other our truths but also shuts up and lets the other person do the same and then engages in a conversation where each side is willing to sacrifice a position to get to a new understanding.

Love is fierce.

Love is defiant.

Love calls us out of the cave.

One of the ironies of the present time is that the church is less and less important to people and yet so needed. What we do here matters for it is the place where we are supported in the thousand small acts of love that put up a fight against the hate, bigotry and violence that comes at every turn.

What we do here matters for we offer a sanctuary for a community that is afraid and hurting.

What we do matters because we, along with our Muslim and Jewish brothers and sisters and other communities of faith, remain committed to love and compassion that is as hard-nosed as it is tender.

¹ Anne Applebaum, Washington Post, June 17,2016

We don't always get it right but we remain steadfast. But we must speak up as the people of God. We must stand at the entrance to other caves and call people out to join us in the fight for a world that is better than yesterday.

What we offer is more than a commitment to a cause. What we offer is a reason for the commitment to the cause. What we offer is a call that drives everything we do. It is that still small voice that called Elijah out of the cave and it is that powerful presence of God that challenged the demons and set a man free in the country of the Gerasenes.

We must be reach out to those who think the church has nothing to say anymore and say "We are here and we stand with you and we will fight and we will sacrifice and we will do the holy and most difficult work of love".

Last Wednesday we put a sign out front saying "We are Orlando". Later that evening I received this Facebook message from a stranger.

As i was driving home from my gym last night and passed by your church as I always do, I stopped and was so heartened to see your "We are Orlando" banner. As a gay man it was so comforting to see the closest church to my home proudly displaying this banner. I was raised Roman Catholic but slowly moved away from the church b/c of their lack of acceptance. Thank you for having the conviction to proudly display this banner!!!

What we do here matters. How we show up for the sake of love matters, a love that is fierce, a love that is defiant *for*

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