



Each week the news is full of any number of stories about people who act in ways that hurt or malign others. Any time there is a school or other killing, just about the first question we ask is “why.”

My friend Carol Mead wrote:

I read a depressing piece entitled "The school shooting contagion," which explores the frighteningly "competitive" nature of such events. One killer said he wanted to "break the record," and another said, "When you see me on the news, you'll all know who I am."

While many factors figure into the contagion, at the core lies a failure to understand the value of each person. A person unsure of his importance goes out and creates importance. The scary part is that such created importance can come either from positive accomplishment or from violence.

We Christians can start edging the momentum back by making our faith clear through our loving treatment of other human beings. We don't do it by saying glibly to another, "God loves you," but by loving on God's behalf. People will begin to believe in God and in God's care for them when they see that care in us.¹

It's another reminder that actions speak louder than words. We become who we say we are when we act like we believe what we say. When our love of God and love of neighbor is evident to the outsider who sees how we live, how we treat others – and especially how we treat those whom we do not personally know. One of our members wrote a thank-you email to a vendor who provided great service to St. John's. I really appreciated the time – and the thought – that the email represented. A willingness to go beyond. A willingness to think about how a written compliment may make it into that person's personnel file and then be considered when it is time for a raise. And, whether that “thank you” ever goes any further, my day was lightened because one of us took the time – had the thought – of saying “thank you, job well done.”

Carey Nieuwhof wrote in an article this week about declining church attendance that:

“In an age that has no scarcity of information but a deep scarcity of meaning, the church is uniquely positioned to answer ‘why’ in a world that is fascinated with ‘what’ and ‘how.’ The church can answer why in [a] world that's starved for meaning. And the church can answer ‘who’ in a world that's starving for relationship.”²

In today's reading from First Kings, we see the interaction between God and Solomon as Solomon becomes king of Israel following David's death. This was a time of transition. A time

¹ Carol Mead, www.holyordinary.com for August 16, 2018.

² <https://careynieuwhof.com/declining-attendance-and-7-preaching-shifts-that-are-happening-right-now/> August 13, 2018

of new leadership. A time when old relationships are changing with a new king who has a new vision. A time also when new relationships are being formed.

But before David died, he left some last minute instructions with Solomon. At the beginning of Chapter 2 we read:

When David's time to die drew near, he charged his son Solomon, saying: 'I am about to go the way of all the earth. Be strong, be courageous, and keep the charge of the LORD your God, walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his ordinances, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, so that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn. (v. 1-3).

David knew from his own experience as king, that keeping his focus on his relationship with God, with understanding that God is the source of all life, all blessings, all the help in times of trouble and sorrow – and all the love that can mean the difference between a life well-lived and a life full of pot holes and deep darkness. No guarantee of a life without challenges, without troubles, sometimes full of wrong turns – but from his own experience David knew and passed on to Solomon that God is ever present and our help if we will acknowledge that relationship and live out that truth in our life.

And thus we come to the time when Solomon was king. The Lord appears to Solomon and says "Ask what I shall give you." Solomon, remembering what his father David had advised, responds to God: "Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil" (2: 5, 9). And so it is. We remember Solomon today mostly as the wise king who decided between the two women fighting over one child. His advice: cut the child in half. And the response from the two women showing him which of the women was the true mother of the disputed baby.³

Solomon thought outside the box for a way to discern between good and evil. We're called to do the same today. Maybe not in cases where lives are at stake from a physical standpoint but rather in ways that respect the dignity of all human beings. A way that realizes that not everyone holds the same opinions that we do. We're called to listen and to listen deeply so that we might get to know the other person and to build relationships of meaning and depth. Our charge from God today if God should ask us what God shall give us is, I hope, to help us live the Way of Love.

In your bulletin this morning is an insert titled: "The Way of Love – Practices for a Jesus-Centered Life" from Presiding Bishop Michael Curry. In our standard Episcopal polity, this is not a mandate – I'm not going to tell you that you can't come to St. John's if you don't follow this. I am, however, going to encourage you to take the insert home. Read it. Discern how the actions of Turn-Learn-Pray-Worship-Bless-Go-and Rest might help you live a fuller life. A life that has meaning not only to you but to all with whom you come into contact. A life that evidences the love that God has for you. A life, in the inimitable words of Aretha Franklin that shows RESPECT for every living creature and his, her or its place in all of creation.

³ See 1 Kings 3: 16-29.

Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the world. Make disciples knowing that you are beloved of God and your charge is to share that love and relationship so that no longer will anyone think the only way to have meaning or importance is to kill someone else. Make disciples who will know their meaning, their foundation, comes from the greatest gift of all: that God loved us and that all the world will know we are Christians by our love lived out every day in what we do and how we act. **Amen.**