

Woodmansey All Age Service Sermon – 20 August 2017

Readings: Isaiah 56.1, 6-8
Romans 11.1-2a, 29-32
Matthew 15.21-28

May I speak in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I don't know about you, but I spend a lot of time watching the news, and commentary about politics and current affairs, and watching or reading or listening to comment and satire about those same stories.

Really, it's almost an addiction, scrolling through Twitter and Facebook, reloading the various news websites I go on, digesting all of the blogs I subscribe to, watching a couple of key regular news shows regularly.

I find it all very compelling to keep up with, to want to know exactly what was said, or what was done, or by who.

I am most definitely a product of the 24 hour news generation.

The problem with keeping all of this news and comment so close, so fast, so intense, is that responses to what is going on in the world around me and in the wider world happens at the same breakneck speed.

If you aren't careful, your own reaction to events can come out in poorly thought through outbursts, either in person, or in social media.

There is a place for making a reaction to an event, to being timely, as Donald Trump and Theresa May have found out recently, but there is also important to spend a little time before making a statement.

I have been grappling over the last week or so about what statement I am supposed to make about the events in Charlottesville last week.

Whether I am even someone who is entitled to make a statement publicly, beyond what I may put on social media.

What wisdom, experience, and advice do I legitimately have to offer?!

Being able to stand here at the front of church and make all of you lovely people endure my voice for eight to ten minutes a month is an incredible privilege, and one I don't want to take advantage of.

But, for all that, I do believe that the Lord who I worship, the Jesus who I read about in the Bible and who's way I follow, the Holy Spirit who guides and leads me as I try my hardest to be a part of

growing the Kingdom of Heaven here on Earth, compel me to speak out about injustices and evils in the world.

Certainly, watching the events of Charlottesville last weekend, my initial reaction would not have been safe for sharing from the front of church.

I see no justification for people marching under the banners of the systemic evil of the 1930's and 40's of Nazism.

How is the KKK even still a thing anymore?

And as for the Confederate symbols and flags and memorabilia; they lost, and they only fought because they wanted to keep slaves!

See, my initial reactions aren't exactly nuanced...

And I can see the appeal in getting up in the faces of those marching for a cause that I find abhorrent.

Making sure that the marchers know that their views have no place in a civilised, progressive, inclusive society.

Meeting them head on, as one would with a bully, to make sure they know that their worldview is not relevant or accurate.

To hate the sin, even when it's so easy to conflate sin and sinner.

Except... When does hate ever overcome hate?

Jesus says, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you.

If these individuals already have the view that it's them against the world, and that they're marching for a righteous cause, by fighting back in this way is only confirming their views, and will cause such misguided people to double down on their aggression.

Don't worry, I'm not suggesting that we roll over and take the bigotry and hate and anger and violence and injustice on the chin without any response.

No, we have to look to the Bible, and the example and teachings of Jesus, and from this morning's reading, have a look at the faith of the Canaanite woman to see how we go forward.

Jesus was all about the non-violence of oppressive regimes and systemic evil; it was kind of his MO.

That example has been lived out by various examples in history, but if we look to the current struggles America is having, Martin Luther King is a pretty good modern example.

There is another, less famous example I'd like to tell you about.

There's a black Christian musician called Daryl Davis. Have any of you heard of him?

He's spent the last 3 decades becoming friends with members of the Ku Klux Klan.

He goes to their rallies, has dinner with them, listens to them, and talks to them.

Instead of, some would say legitimately, protesting and yelling at these people who initially don't even see his humanity, he gets to know them and asks

“How can you hate me when you don't even know me? Look at me and tell me to my face why you should lynch me?”

He doesn't go out with the intention of converting anyone, just getting to know them, trying to understand their worldview, trying to put across his.

And of course, once these so-called white supremacists get to know Daryl, they look into his eyes and see an equal human being.

Jesus sat down and ate with prostitutes, tax collectors, sinners.

He broke bread with these lowest of the low, and raised them up to be better versions of themselves.

I do believe there is a time and a place for protest, and demonstration, and making your voice heard with thousands of others so that the people in power of the systems that are in place to divide us know that they are fighting against the tide.

But, I also believe that is just a small part of the picture.

It's what we do once the protesters have dispersed, once the placards have been discarded, once those in power have declined to say anything.

That's when we must search out the different, the other, the one whose view is diametrically opposed to ours, and break bread with them.

I pray that big changes happen in our world to tear down systemic evil and discrimination, but all of that starts with one person.

If we can each take opportunities given to us to sit down with those we meet who we disagree with, to get to know these people, to love them, then maybe, just maybe, this will be the start of the revolution of love our world needs.

Sounds impossible, doesn't it?!

Talking of impossible, our Canaanite woman asked something impossible of Jesus.

She asked, begged, for Jesus' help. He replied that he was here only for the Israelites.

“Sorry love, but you're from the wrong side of the tracks. Your people have previous with the people I'm here for.”

But she persisted. This woman had come to Jesus as He was her only hope.

This prayer of hers to him wasn't a ritual, it was the outpouring of her soul, and she absolutely couldn't take no for an answer.

I know our world has seen a lot of mess and hate, but I think our prayer begging to be given the skills and opportunities and words and strength and courage to make a difference, to be the difference, has to be because we know Jesus is our only hope.

We can't take no for an answer. Amen.