

Sermon for July 15, 2018
Eighth Sunday after Pentecost
Proper 10 - Year B
Barbara Marshall

Psalm 85:8-13
Amos 7:7-15

Mark 6:14-29
Ephesians 1:3-14

Speak Up! Show Love! A lesson we can learn from today's lectionary readings.

In Psalm 85 God is speaking peace to his faithful people. The writer asks God to show us steadfast love. Amos is instructed to prophesy to the people of Israel. His radical message of the need for loving social justice makes Amos an important prophet for many modern day Bible readers. In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he states that we are lovingly redeemed as God's children through Jesus Christ and have been marked with the seal of the Holy Spirit.

It's a little harder to find the love in the Gospel lesson with the gruesome decapitation of John the Baptist. When I first read the Gospel in preparation for this sermon, my first reaction was "Oh NO! How did I get so lucky to have this narrative to preach about?" When I preached on June 24th I shared my

thoughts on remaining calm with the stormy news of world events we hear about daily. The Gospel that Sunday was about Jesus calming the rough seas when he and his disciples were in a boat during a storm. Stormy events happen even when we have Jesus. But with carving out time for His help, we can receive guidance in dealing with the storms.

John the Baptist's demise in today's Gospel certainly can send chills up and down one's spine. So where was the Love! I had to do some research to find it and this is what I learned.

The Bible tells us that Jesus healed many while on earth, but John was not spared. Power meets sin in today's Gospel lesson. John met his demise as a result of a reckless promise made at a party hosted by King Herod Antipas. According to the Roman historian, Josephus, Herod had an affair with his brother's wife, Herodias, before finally divorcing his wife and marrying Herodias. John the Baptist, the prophet, was willing to confront power. He spoke up! His words perplexed Herod and yet he liked to listen to John. But Herod foolishly granted his step-daughter whatever she wished as a result of her entertaining dance. Herod was grieved but it was too late. So where is the love in this situation?

Herod's thoughtless love for his wife's child led to death for John. In my opinion, the greater love in this story was demonstrated by the disciples of John when they bravely asked for the body of the executed John. This was an act which could have provoked the ire of the authorities. But they had learned at least one thing from John. Sometimes you just have to do the right thing. Speak Up! Show Love!

I found a humorous story which can perhaps help us not only to laugh but to see we too may have opportunities to Speak Up! Show Love!

After getting all of Pope Benedict's luggage loaded into a limo, the driver notices that the Pope is still standing on the curb.

"Excuse me, Your Holiness," says the driver, "Would you please take your seat so we can leave?"

"Well, to tell you the truth," says the Pope, "they never let me drive at the Vatican when I was a cardinal, and I'd really like to drive today."

"I'm sorry, Your Holiness but I cannot let you do that. I'd lose my job! And what if something should

happen?" protests the driver, wishing he'd never gone to work that morning.

"Who's going to tell? Besides, there might be something extra in it for you," says the Pope with a smile.

Reluctantly, the driver gets in the back as the Pope climbs in behind the wheel.

The driver quickly regrets this decision when, after exiting the airport, the Pontiff floors it, accelerating the limo to 105 mph. "Please slow down, Your Holiness!" Pleads the worried driver, but the Pope keeps the pedal to the metal until they hear sirens.

"Oh dear God, I'm gonna lose my license-and my job!" moans the driver.

The Pope pulls over and rolls down the window as the cop approaches, but the cop takes on look at him, goes back to his motorcycle, and gets on the radio.

"I need to talk to the chief," he says to the dispatcher. The chief gets on the radio and the cop tells him that he's stopped a limo going a hundred and five.

“So bust him”, says the chief.

“I don’t think we want to do that, he’s really important,” said the cop.

The chief exclaimed, “All the more reason!:

“NO, I mean really important,” said the cop with a bit of persistence.

The chief then asked, “Who ya got there, the mayor?”

Cop: “Bigger.”

Chief, “The president?”

Cop: “Bigger.”

“Well,” said the chief, “Who is it?”

Cop: “ I think it’s God!”

The chief is even more puzzled and curious. “What makes you think it’s God?”

Cop: “He’s got the Pope as a chauffeur.”

The story has a lot of power and a lot of truth-speaking going on. First the driver tries to speak truth to the Pope, and then the cop tries to speak truth to the chief. Both cases go a little wonky, but the main connection is that they tried. And it turned out to be difficult. Speaking truth to power is a scary endeavor, and can often be dangerous.

Recently, I was sitting on our back patio in my glider. It was a beautiful, sunny and comfortable evening. A man came walking across the school field and as he approached our back fence he asked, "Are you the only American left in this neighborhood?" I shrugged my shoulders and said, "I don't know." He replied, "I am sick of what has moved in around here." I was shocked at his comment but I spoke up and said loud and clear, "God created us all!" His response surprised me. He turned back as he started to walk away and said, "Thanks! I needed to hear that."

Finding courage to Speak Up and Show Love can be difficult and perhaps even dangerous. But we do need to speak out against things that are wrong. My experience could have ended differently but it didn't and for that I am grateful. Our tone of voice can make a difference. Learning when to say what you

have to say without getting into a continuous argument can be helpful. Say what you feel and then zip the lips. If we want peace and love we have speak peace and love. There may be a cost butRosa Parks did! Martin Luther King did! The psalm writer did! Amos and Paul did! Jesus did!

In our own time and place, there are prophets living among us who give their lives for their witness to God's reconciliation, peace, and justice; they are prophets who speak not in powerful oratory but in the quiet simplicity of their selfless generosity and service to others. At some time, we will each face our own "prophetic moment." May we embrace it with the courage of God's wisdom and the optimism of God's compassion.

Resources for this sermon:

- The New Interpreters Study Bible
- Connections for July 15, 2018
- Lectionary Levity – The use of Humor in Preaching by Ian S. Markham and Samantha R.E. Gottlich, pp. 147-149

