

Beyond Winners and Losers (When Will They Ever Learn?)

Acts 6:1-8; 7:51, 54-8:1

St. Marks UMC, Charleston, WV 5th Sunday of Easter May 14, 2017

When we focus on “issues,” on primarily “problem solving” (as is the curse of our culture) we insist on “solutions only” – making winners and losers. Instead the early church, we see in this scripture, focused on relationships, nurture and mystery. However, the “righteous church” from which they were gradually been cast out was all about “right and wrong” all about “winners and losers.” Stephen did not speak orthodoxy and so they killed him. And Saul (before his life changing relationship encounter with Jesus, and being renamed Paul) we are told was in agreement.

Look back to April 30 (the Emmaus Road experience) – there the “sound biblical teaching” that Cleopas and friend received from Jesus on how to interpret scriptures was NOT what the disciples

recorded. Rather, they discussed *how their eyes were opened*. It was in their relationship with Jesus that their eyes were opened.

If we remember last week (May 7) we saw that the early church's teaching was about *sharing in communion and compassion* (from each according to their ability to each according to their need.) It was about relationship.

For me, I remember the video shown as the Opus Chorale sang the song from the Saving Private Ryan movie ... thousands and thousands of tombs were shown:

Surenes, France	1,541 Americans
Aisne-Marne, France	2,289
North Africa, Tunisia	2,841
Cambridge, England	3,812
St. Mihiel, France	4,153

Florence, Italy 4,402

Brittany, France 4,410

Luxembourg, Luxembourg 5,076

Ardennes, Belgium 5,329

Epinal, France 5,525

Oise-Aisne, France 6,012

Sicily, Italy 7,861

Henri-Chappelle, Belgium 7,992

Netherlands, Netherlands 8,301

Normandy, France 9,387

Lorraine, France 10,489

Meuse-Argonne, France 14,246

Manila, Philippines 16,636

Arlington National, VA, USA 300,000 and counting

all people who died for the perpetuation of a ***Winners and Losers*** way of thinking, living, and – alas -- dying. **“When Will They Ever Learn?”** sang Peter, Paul and Mary. **“When Will They Ever Learn?”**

A mother’s love is not merit based. In our prayer for community, we have been praying for several weeks, referring to the text from the Gospel of Matthew (23:37): **God, You desire for all Your children to be joined, as a Mother Hen calls her chicks under her wings.**

It’s not a love of winners and losers. It’s a love for all.

God, Jesus tells us: **“makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.”** (Matthew 5:45)

“When Will They Ever Learn?” “When Will They Ever Learn?”

Tell the story of: A child who is angry with his mother, is in anguish when she dies and they are unreconciled. Then a couple of years later his father begins to see another woman and he is so upset about this, he repeats the same failed scenario – refusing to speak to his father, until he, too, dies, and the son is bereft of solace.

Tell the story of: The PMLS student whose answer to the a question about how to deal with a child who makes a life decision with which the parent disagrees. And he answers: I would have to write the child off, as not my own. She had chosen sin. Really? (I, by the way, could not recommend that this student – despite his great sense of righteousness – should be allowed to be a pastor.)

“When Will They Ever Learn?” “When Will They Ever Learn?”

Tell the story of: Bishop Ives’ conversation with me ... *Monty, did you never have a time in your life of which you were not particularly proud?*

Jesus came to show us a new way. It’s a way that is different than we are used to doing. It’s about more than just problem solving. It’s a way of doing more than making winners and losers.

Anybody can find fault. **Fault finding is one of the simplest tasks in the world.** But it’s not the Jesus way.

Jesus came to show us how to **form relationships**. Jesus came to show us how to love.

Stephen was one of the first witnesses to this. Even when they were stoning him, he acted in the same way Jesus did when they were crucifying him.

It's a way that many of us saw as children when we told our mothers that we hated them – as, I'm told most children have done at one time or another during a fit of anger.

- **It's a way** in which love overrules winning.
- **It's a way** in which love overrules making someone else wrong.
- **It's a way** that searches for creative ways to deal with life situations other than striking out to conquer, to make winners and losers. (Because quite frankly – as those graves pointed out – it so often makes losers and losers!)
- **It's a way** that is full of mystery and awe.

The early church was called **THE WAY**. And, like so many of our mothers lived, so we each are called to witness to it, by doing it.

And many people will not understand. Because they want to only problem solve. They want to only make winners and losers.

But love them anyway.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.