

Jeff's Jottings
February 14, 2020

"Love, Love, Love, Love...."

...the gospel in a word is love. Love thy neighbor as thy brother*, love, love, love."

(*modern versions say, "love your neighbor as yourself")

What better time than a 17-degree-below-zero Valentine's Day morning to recall a classic hippy summer camp song from half a century ago. Its composer, at least on the respected website hymnary.org, is listed as "Anonymous." That's not how I pronounce the name of the speaker of the Sermon on the Mount, but okay, I get the point.

We're in the midst of a lectionary tour of Jesus' most famous sermon right now, as we journey through those three oft-quoted chapters in Matthew. It's already had some interesting stops. At the National Prayer Breakfast last week, for instance, Arthur Brooks introduced his talk on polarization and contempt in society with these words—"I am a follower of Jesus, who taught each of us to love God and to love each other"—and would later quote directly from Matthew 5. Words the President would later refute.

On Sunday night, at the Academy Awards, actor Shia LaBeouf and his *Peanut Butter Falcon* co-star, Zack Gottsagen, presented the Oscar for Best Live Action Short Film, and Twitter blew up. Not to celebrate Gottsagen as the first person with Down Syndrome ever to present an Oscar, but to castigate LaBeouf's perceived slights of Gottsagen as he struggled with some of his words. There is yet another story this week of Russian hacks sowing seeds of societal toxicity, this time broadcast on Kansas City radio. We were urged at our anti-racism training last week to set aside our all-too pervasive view of scarcity for one of abundance. Let's just say there aren't many people these days singing—with their lives, at least—hippy camp songs.

Love, love, love, love, the gospel in a word is love...

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have?

Here's what I think about love today. It has a power that is in many ways the antithesis of so much of what we see in the world around us, which in reality is no power at all; except, of course, the power of God in our own commitments to follow Jesus. In his Prayer Breakfast address, Brooks' challenged his listeners: "Ask God to give you the strength to do this hard thing — to go against human nature, to follow Jesus' teaching and love your enemies. Ask God

to remove political contempt from your heart. In your weakest moments, maybe even ask (God) to help you fake it!”

On a Valentine’s Day that intersects the Sermon on the Mount the way this year does, I am reminded how much I have yet to learn. Our deeply divided world also reminds me of the urgency of this lesson, and how the church can and must lead. *Love, love, love, love...*