

In William Briscoe's book entitled "You Hear Me, But Are You Listening" he talks about what inhibits our clear communication. One thing he notes is our "belief filter." He says, "you filter everything you hear through beliefs about yourself, about life, and about others. Your political, religious and other strong beliefs change the message you are 'hearing.' [People] will filter all conversations through that belief. [They] will hear the things validating [their] belief and ignore the things that do not agree with it."¹ I think there is a lot of truth in that analysis. It's fascinating that people can hear different things from the same speech, play, presentation, book or even a sermon. We gravitate and affirm the things we *want* to hear, and we ignore or gloss over the things that don't speak to us.

¹ https://books.google.com/books?id=GN-4CgAAQBAJ&pg=PA34&dq=You+Hear+Me,+But+Are+You+Listening&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiU1af_2M_KAhWMVz4KHRYgDPoQ6AEIHTAA#v=onepage&q=You%20Hear%20Me%20C%20But%20Are%20You%20Listening&f=false

Today both Jesus and Paul are playing back what was recorded so that it *can* clearly be heard. In today's reading we initially find Jesus well received in his hometown. The people are amazed and speaking kindly of him. This is Jesus. He's one of theirs, and they're proud of him! They haven't asked Jesus for anything. However, Jesus starts to name complaints *they* have but have not articulated. At a closer look *Jesus* is the protagonist here, and not the crowd. Jesus uses his comments as a bridge to replay God's story for his hometown listeners. It's a story that requires an examination of their belief filters. This story is of God who favors the outsiders too. Jesus calls them to remember the "drought-stricken, famine-ridden land of many widows" where God designated one person, who was a *nonbeliever*, to make known both God's presence and power. Then again, a Syrian was the only one who was cured even though there were many diseased Jews to be healed – *again* God chose an outsider.

The naming of these stories angers the crowd! After all, they're in the synagogue, they are all Jews, and Jesus reminds them that God came to the outsiders and *not* the Jewish people. This is *not* what the people believe. It's rude, if not offensive. These are the people who raised Jesus. These are the people whom he *should* favor. These are his close family members, friends, teachers, and elders. How dare he say these things to *them*, of all people? And they can't handle evaluating those belief filters; so they chase Jesus to a cliff and try to silence what they don't want to hear.

I understand the crowd's reaction. If I were in the story I would probably be one of the insiders listening to Jesus. Having known Jesus for so long, I'd *expect* some appreciation. I'd expect Jesus to be grateful and value our beliefs. I'd expect Jesus to be the hometown hero who comes to our town and brings life. But, this talk about the outsiders seems like a slap in the face. It's frustrating, angering, and upsetting.

In Luke that *is* the point. Jesus's message should frustrate us and challenge us. You *should* walk away from a sermon on Luke a bit frustrated, agitated, and annoyed. Luke is about the Gospel's universalism. He is a social justice-oriented writer. Luke is one who demands that we see God tangibly in our midst. Luke is challenging our belief filters. Luke *should* offend you. Luke offends *me*.

These offensive words that Jesus shares and that Luke proclaims, reminds me of what Eugene Peterson mentions in his book entitled "Eat this Book." He says, "[The Bible] makes us *participants* in the world of God's being and action; but we don't participate on *our* own terms. We don't get to make up the plot or decide what character we will be. This book has *generative* power; things happen *to* us as we let the text call forth, stimulate, rebuke, prune us. We don't end up the same."

Here in Luke we are challenged to see the world differently. We are called to hear the story of God's presence with those on the outside *in addition to* those on the inside. Here the emphasis is on the expansion of a message of love and grace that is boundless. Here we see the tendency of those on the inside who want to reject change that brings in someone new. Welcoming someone new is challenging. Nevertheless, Jesus says that God's community is not just about those who are already present – in fact it's about bringing in those who aren't here yet.

At our WPLC Basics class last week we had 13 people. Two of the key things people said kept them in this community were: first, our welcome to all people and secondly, our engagement of the world outside this building. While it is easy to speak a message of welcome, it's more difficult to live it. Welcoming others requires continued work. To share community with someone who is different is a challenge. To be in community requires us to walk along side of

those who are different. To be in community requires a new approach – an approach centered in love.

In the famous passage from 1 Corinthians Paul opens up our understanding of love. Paul writes to a divided church in Corinth. The main problem there is that some are asserting that their gifts are more important than others. People in this community are using their intelligence, their status, their wealth, their careers, and their influence to argue that they should have more. The last two weeks we heard Paul remind them that all gifts come from God and all are important. In our reading today Paul has an important emphasis. Paul argues that *how* we go about achieving a goal is just as important as the goal. Process has a lasting impact. He's saying that the way we engage, the way we give criticism, the way we make our decisions, the way we have discussions in meetings, and the way we help those in need *is* important. It's important for us to do actions *with* love -a love that patient and kind; a love that isn't envious or

boastful or arrogant or rude; a love that doesn't insist on its own way; a love that isn't resentful; but rather a love that rejoices in truth. It's a love that cares about the community of people gathered. It's a love that looks beyond our self-centeredness. A love that knows our God first loved us.

It's a lofty goal of love that Paul sets. Yet, it's not about perfection, it's about process. It is about striving towards love in the midst of our failures. It's about being a people of God centered in mindfulness of how we treat others. It's a pathway that is focused on love of God, love of others, and love of self.

Earlier in the service we were drawn into the baptism of Scarlett. She became a member of this community. As a community of faith we welcomed her into this place and promised to support her. Baptism is the extravagant sign of welcome. Baptism is the place where we are reminded that God first loved us by no action of our

own. Baptism is where we hear the voice of God say, “you are my beloved child with whom I am well pleased.”

Today, my friends, *hear* the voice of God. Live into Luke’s agitation to explore your belief filters. Be uncomfortable with the welcome of the unknown stranger. Then, hear that our God’s love is what brings us all together. Remember *you* were once a stranger. Remember that you were *first* loved into being. *Remember* that love, and then go into the world to love all people. Amen.