

June 26, 2016 - Year C Sixth Sunday after Pentecost
1 Kings 19:15-16,19-21 - Psalm 16 - Galatians 5:1,13-25 - Luke 9:51-62
The Rev. Luk De Volder

Let's take a deep breath here this morning. In times like these we wonder where we can take a breather, when gun violence and startling politics shock our lives. Bringing our issues and shortcomings in relationship with God, unifies us. May God's peace be with you!

Speaking of division, hate, and violence. We barely processed the Orlando shooting and there came the Brexit. Someone twittered: Has anyone tried to turn the country off and on again? And this Brexit is no trumpery (which is a real dictionary word). So soon we might see Portugo, Quitaly or Beljump. But did you notice that most reporting focussed on the financial and economic fall out of the Brexit? Few media reported on the E-U's importance to foster relationships. And this is my point this morning. We only have a seasonal appreciation for relationships. Most of the time we focus on the functional side of life. And here we face the real major source of conflict and violence.

They way a café in Paris listed the price of a coffee last summer sums up my point very well. The chalkboard price listing displayed a cup of coffee as follows: Un café — 7 euros; Bonjour, un café — 4.25 euro; Bonjour, un café, s'il vous plait, — 1.40 euro. For the French the bonjour and s'il vous plait are not just about courtesy. They mostly are about expressing connection, relationship, acknowledgement that the other is not simply an instrument. Losing the relational and getting caught up in the functional happens rather easily. Because in the functional life things seem to work, like clockwork. Life is clear in functional world, binary clear. It is either or, us versus them. And the functional consumes the relational. Time is all about work, rarely about each other. The barista better hurry; he is no longer someone, but something. Goodbye "bonjour"!

When these shocking events of Orlando shootings or Brexit referendums happen, we find ourselves in the turmoil and we wonder - by now embarrassingly - how did we get here? There are many deep questions, but the functional M.O. keeps consequently plowing. "Insurgent movements of left and right, spread and grow at scale and speed supported by the [binary] polarized and fragmented news coverage".¹ Despite our soul searching the battle for middle-earth continues to rage. And as Czeslaw Milosz argued in his book, *The Captive Mind*, we "risk to resign ourselves to life under a state of random terror, allowing the forces of division, isolation, or hate to run a coup on our liberties."² So what can we do?

In the readings today we hear Paul calling out for a total different way of living: "*For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery - but through love become slaves to one another. For "You shall love your neighbor as yourself"* (Galatians 5:1).

For the biblical world, life is first and foremost relational. Losing the relational part and giving priority to the functional side of life, means the start of slavery and violence. One of the strongest breaking points between the Roman world and the Gospel world was exactly this functional way versus the relational way

¹ <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/26/opinion/tony-blair-brexit-stunning-coup.html>

² <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/22/opinion/americas-new-normal.html>

of operating. For the Gospel the body is not an inferior instrument of the soul, nature is not a goldmine to exploit, nor is life about clockwork performance. Especially the Gospel of John and Luke fulminate against the blindness for the relational value of life and the violence of the functional way of operating. Because this thoughtless functioning put the Messiah on the cross! Reducing others into instruments and compartmentalizing the call to love one another into a footnote can be deadly, for the individual and for a community.

But isn't there an issue with the Gospel if 2000 years of reading these texts didn't succeed in breaking out of this functional world view? For a long list of reasons Christianity has often been used and reduced to a tool, as a political power tool or as a moral order, like one that Voltaire favored as the useful side of Christianity, to keep order in society. The tactical application of love as path to freedom, a methodical love project in which we become "slaves/servants" to one another, this way of operating has only rarely found favor among leaders. And yet, if we really are about uprooting the sources of violence, ending crucifixions, if we really would like for our society to find some balance again, if we really wish we had leaders who do not resign to impotence; then we need to confront this repetitive way of functional life through which our Western culture so regularly slides into the abyss of nationalism or bigotry or gun-violence with tactical love of non-dualistic, no-dichotomy operating.

How does this work? Operating relationally can start simple. For example, our problems. From a functional view they need to be solved. From a relational view they need encounter, empathy; the problem is not the enemy. The problem, the illness, the shortcoming can even become a friend. Another example, our preferences. From a functional view we advocate for our self interests. In a relational view we bring our preferences in relationship with others and try to see how they could grow as well. Or the white collar ivory tower could take the time to really listen to "the deepening plights of the blue collar" grass roots worker.³

This summer we will reconnect with the Gospel, its often forgotten tools and values and rediscover what they offer us for today. Today we connected with the fact that the New Testament confronted our functional approach to life and stressed the importance of relational living as a way to set out of a mentality of violence.

Let's take a deep breath here this morning. When gun violence and startling politics cause a weekly shape of the foundation of our culture, we tactically return to relational living. Here and now with God, where we can put our differences aside and allow ourselves to rest in the unifying relationship with God. Because God is relational, and so the Life is relational, not divisive, hate-generating, or exclusionary. Bringing our issues and shortcomings in relationship with God, unifies us, balances us. May God's peace be with you!

³ <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/22/opinion/americas-new-normal.html>