

Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, Jan 6th 2015

In 1938 the Broadway musical team of Rodgers and Hart produced a musical called “The Boys from Syracuse”. One of its melodies has become part of the standard repertoire of countless vocalists ever since. The tune was memorable, but its lyrics were cynical and full of discouragement. They went:

Falling in love with love is falling for make-believe

Falling in love with love is playing the fool.

Caring too much in such a juvenile fancy

Learning to trust is just for children in school.

Its mood matched the times. The Great Depression was still raging. The world had already tipped into a global war – both in Europe and in Asia – a conflict into which the United States would soon be drawn.

Where were we Christians? Why was our voice not raised? “Wrong!” we should have been shouting. “That’s not true! None of it is true!”

Today’s first reading makes the astounding statement that “God is love”. It says that “Falling in love with love (God)” is not make-believe; it is the only real reality. It is echoed in Paul’s soaring affirmation that “nothing can separate us from the love of God that comes to us in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:39). It was a truth about which Paul said he was absolutely certain. It is a reality in which we can trust – trust absolutely.

“Learning to trust” is not just for children in school. In Jesus’ parable of the sower (Matt 30:4–9) the first and the most basic meaning is that we can trust God, that Jesus did in fact trust God totally. Thus, though much of the seed failed to bear fruit, that which grew produced a miraculous harvest. Although this parable has been extensively allegorized, scripture scholars tell us that, as uttered by Jesus, it was precisely to counter criticisms that his program was going nowhere. It was a retort that said, in effect, that despite setbacks, God’s way would triumph in the end. We can count on it!

And “caring too much”? Was Calvary a “juvenile fancy”?

Christianity grew from just a few hundred individuals (at most) at the Resurrection to majority status in the Roman empire in under 300 years – precisely because it brought good news to a world blanketed by a pall of despair. The world is as hungry to hear that message now as it was in Paul’s time. It was hungry for it nineteen centuries later when Lorenz Hart composed those sad lyrics. And Paul, quoting Isaiah, blessed those who bring the good news, reminding his converts (and us) “How can they hear unless there is someone to proclaim [it]” (Romans 10:15)

What good news we have to share! Lord, open our mouths! Give us the words you want us to bring to our world!

Robert Heaney-Creighton University School of Medicine