

Commentary on the Gospel for Mon, Jun 19th 2017

In both the passage from Paul's letter and in the Gospel we are asked to reflect on how to respond to antagonism. In 2 Corinthians 6:1-10, Paul is not brought down by unjust attacks against his ministry. In Matthew 5:38-42, Jesus speaks against action out of retribution.

At least for me, forbearance in the face of opposition is hard. Generally when I encounter mindsets that are different from my own, my response is not patience and a desire to meaningfully engage. I can observe this clearly in my television watching habits during news/public affairs/interview programming. My frustration with the things that I hear leads me to flip through the channels until I find a commentary with which I can be comfortable. (Although the fact I still watch television is probably a sign of age, I see the same kind of selective behavior in those who get their information online. It may be that we may have the means to better avoid reconciliation than at any other time in history.)

My sense is that how a person responds comes down to how one loves. Jesus seems to be calling us to love unconditionally. Paul, infused with the Holy Spirit, appears to be doing just that. My experience is that in my relationships, love (and my ability to experience reconciliation) is something that does depend on the response that I receive from the other. It is only in special cases that I am able to love unconditionally, and that, at least in my case, seems to center on my immediate family. Even there, the unconditional nature of this love can be called into question.

I have heard the process of reconciliation and dealing with antagonism described as similar to Elisabeth Kübler-Ross' 5 stages of death and dying: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Although these stages are not necessarily linear and distinct, Paul and Jesus clearly want me to jump that 5th stage. My experience has tended to be that, if I ever am fully reconciled and at peace, it is only after working my way through some of the other stages. When I feel that I have been unjustly wronged, my initial reaction is typically not the renewed efforts at community building following the model of Paul or a demonstration of the unconditional love of Jesus. Hurt, anger and a desire for revenge are often my first feelings. Reconciliation seems to require time and the establishment of trust when it grows out of a relationship that is primarily transactional. I almost always respond to injury and betrayal with a desire for the retribution that Jesus speaks against. Although I seldom choose the response of retribution, I often interiorize my frustrations leaving me with issues with those involved and a reticence for dealing with people in general. (I attribute the measurable decrease in my blood pressure after going into "semi-retirement" to the decrease in this type of interaction.)

Today, I pray for the ability to love as Jesus loved and for the gift of the Spirit so that I can interact as

Paul interacted.

Heavenly Father,

I ask for ability to love following the model of Your Son.

I thank you for the gift of this life. Help me to respond with gratitude.

I ask for the patience, resilience and courage that Your Spirit brings.

Help me to see the good of Your handiwork in the people and the world around me.

Allow me to act responsibly supporting creation as a servant rather than as a judge.

Share with me your counsel and knowledge to act appropriately.

Give me the wisdom to let go what should be let go.

Grant me the fortitude to continue on in the face of adversity when it is in Your service.

Mike Cherney-Creighton University's Physics Department