



"But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded them."

1 John 2:11

"Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord." Romans 12:9-11

Do you remember the children's game, "Guess Who?" Each player tries to guess the correct person out of 20 different people: curious hairstyles, personal style and of course different races. My Kid's Hope mentee would love playing the game; it was our go-to. But what's interesting is the fact that race would never be one of his identifying characteristics. He would look first at facial hair, earrings, glasses, color of hair, or what they were wearing.

I was reminded of that this week as I stood listening to the unbelievable comments of two adults. Did they really say what I thought I heard them say? I stood there trying to convince myself that somehow, I heard something wrong; surely, I was off in my own thoughts and didn't hear what was said correctly. But then again, there were more unwanted words and this time they got even louder as I stood there feeling a tremendous sense of disappointment and anger that someone would even think that way, let alone think it was acceptable to give voice to it.

Clearly in the real-life game of "Guess Who?", race is often a primary identifier. Just glance at the news and you will see headlines depicting the tensions that surround the race and diversity in our country. Just stand in a small gathering of people in Strongsville, and you will be reminded that no place is immune to the realities of this unwanted truth. Racism is alive and thriving, even within our own little part of this world.

I read recently: *“Racism is prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed at someone of a different race based on the belief that one’s own race is superior. In other words – racism is rooted in pride. Pride was the first sin. Just look at Adam and Eve. Thinking they knew better than God led to their downfall. Pride can often be humanities worst sin.*

But the danger of pride is how easily it can creep into our lives and, without warning, lead to hate, prejudice, and even racism. The Bible says in Romans that we all have sinned; we’ve all messed up. As a result, we can all harbor certain prejudices. For some it may be very subtle but for others, prejudices may run much deeper: perhaps negative beliefs and opinions regarding other people and races.”

So, how do we respond? It’s so easy to focus on the blatant racism we see on the news. But shouldn’t the first step be for us to ask God to help us as we work to identify the pride and prejudices, big or small, in our own hearts. Isn’t knowing where we stand valuable information to the whole? Knowing what pushes our buttons or where those weaknesses exist. Asking ourselves the hard questions and then standing strong as we discover the answers. Certainly, it is important for us to know our own hearts. What the reality of those feelings are and then to consider those feelings as we think about our Christian call and ability to love. What does loving God and loving others mean within our everyday lives? Within the realities of this world? Isn’t that what becomes primary, even when we are witnessing prejudice at its worst?

There is a story that explains this well in the Gospel of John. One day, Jesus came across a Samaritan woman at a well and asked her for a drink. She responded to Him, “You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” The latter part of the verse helps us realize Jews did not associate with Samaritans.

This Samaritan woman wasn’t someone a Jewish person would usually interact with. In fact, Jews and Samaritans hated each other. Their rivalry went back over 700 years. But Jesus, by asking this Samaritan woman for a drink of water, showed His followers that every person is made in the image of God and deserves to be treated with dignity and respect.

At a time when other Jews refused to interact with Samaritans, Jesus put love for God and neighbor above racist beliefs and prejudices. Jesus stepped over barriers because He believed in showing love to all people. As a result, this woman heard about the love of Jesus and invited other Samaritans to come hear Him as well.

In hindsight, I wish I would have responded to the hatred I heard that day with a stronger sense of love. Rather than getting frustrated and being taken back by the racist comments I heard, I wish I would have simply spoken up with a voice for the love that needs to exist; the love that God holds for all His children – even the two who angered me by their hateful words. Instead, I deliberately walked away, as if that were some kind of statement to be said. In reality, all that accomplished was to allow my disappointment and frustration to impact my day and even my thoughts to this day.

As I continue to wrestle, I recall something Desmond Tutu once said, *“We are each made for goodness, love and compassion. Our lives are transformed as much as the world is when we live with these truths.”* Were truer words ever spoken? I hope you find Bishop Tutu’s words, as well as Jesus’ actions, worthy of some deep thought and prayer. I truly believe it’s about time that we find the power within us to love the hatred and prejudice away.

Prayer:

Dear God,

Show me how to be good, and loving, and compassionate today, so that I may be transformed and also transform the world around me. Amen