

Preached by Dr. Carl A. Rush
Bush Hill Presbyterian Church
Alexandria, VA 22310
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Isaiah 42:1–9
Acts 10:34–43

From the pastor's sermon notes ...

A REMINDER

I think I have mentioned Bishop William Willimon, former dean of Duke University chapel, from this pulpit before. He has said we are in danger of turning the Gospel into a feeling and transforming the Kingdom of God into a mood. What he means is we have lost the changing power of the Gospel because we have “psychologized” Jesus’ radical call to love as he has loved.

He goes on to say, “It’s as if we have recreated the Messiah into some cosmic affirmation of everything we hold dear and all our illusions.” (Did we hear that word ‘illusion’ in our request for God to forgive us? Did we stop to think what that might mean?) “It is an illusion to believe God loves what we love. It is reality to begin to live by loving what God Loves!”

God loves obedience to Christ’s demand to be reborn—reformed—converted again and again. God loves our response when we say “OK, God, you decide how I can fulfill the task of being your loving disciple.”

Yesterday at Presbytery, a man preached in halting phrases because he is from Brazil. It seems his family and friends are starting a new Presbyterian Church in this Presbytery. He preached about us being one with Christ and one with one another. Not like-minded or alike in background or culture, but united in our devotion for one another through Jesus. At one point he summed up so much of what we overlook about the Gospel. He said, “If people outside the church look at us and do not see unity, they will say to themselves ‘I might as well stay out of church; it is no different than what I am experiencing now.’”

If the world looks at this Body of Jesus and doesn’t see our love for those like us and those different from us, what is the point of claiming to follow Jesus?

Be in the world, but not of the world. Be so different in your love for one another that no one can doubt that you belong to Jesus.

Peter is describing a personal life-changing love which religion and religious people often try to tame. God intends to share with us a love which is at once personal and outstanding. God’s love is wild by our standards. It reverses conventional categories that we use to say who is in and who is out. God’s love eats with sinners precisely because the religious people have failed to show sinners the life-changing power of God’s love.

Instead of saying your enemy is my enemy, the Gospel says to have genuine love in your heart for those who would hurt you.

This kind of new life is only possible when Jesus takes up residence in our hearts. This kind of new life does still happen when we look at one another and believe we share one Lord, one faith, and one baptism—all of which results in reconciliation, unity, and a generosity outside the boundaries: a kind of out pouring of what we have received from Jesus.

Amen.