

I must admit something to all of you. I have a hearing problem. It is an issue I really don't want to face, but I am going to have to deal with it. I know I must address it because, at times, I misunderstand what people are saying. At times, I misunderstand what my husband says, what Dorothy says, and probably what some of you say if you speak rather softly. And, if I misunderstand you at times, I am sorry.

Anyway, my point in telling you this today is not so much about my hearing issue as it is about **misunderstanding**. I think for all of us, the reality is that at some point in time we have been **misunderstood or, we have misunderstood someone else**. As David Lose says, "To be...is to be misunderstood."

In today's gospel reading we hear Jesus share this little parable about children playing in the market place, and **they** are misunderstood. The children play a glad, happy song for their friends, but no one dances. Then, they play a sad, mournful dirge, but no one mourns or weeps. Jesus goes on to say, the children were no better understood than John the Baptist or he, himself.

Jesus is addressing the failure of society as a whole to understand and respond to the messages he and John had proclaimed. Their

messages had been extremely clear. However, society – the entire generation – was unfaithful and fickle. The people had been given every opportunity to hear, but they refused. They had heard from both John and Jesus and they could not decide what they wanted.

Now, John and Jesus could not have been more opposite in style. John appeared on the scene as this eccentric, sober, teetotaler who ate bugs and honey for lunch, wore scratchy clothing made from animal hair, and often fasted. He came addressing his listeners as a “brood of vipers,” proclaiming a message that was all about austere repentance. *But, the people complained.* Some even labeled him as demon possessed. Jesus, on the other hand, invaded the scene as this welcoming character who feasted, ate, drank and partied with all sorts of people. He came proclaiming the good news of a God of love, a God of disturbing, startling, astonishing inclusiveness. He came healing the sick and performing all sorts of miracles. *But, the people dismissed him.* Some even called him a glutton and a drunkard. Listening to **other** voices in their culture, the whole generation, a whole people, did not understand the song of these two very different men. Listening to other voices around them, they did not know when to dance and when to mourn. Commentator, Elizabeth Johnson, puts it this way:

This generation finds reason to take offense at both John and Jesus and thus **evade** the call of both. They are like children in the marketplace who cannot decide whether they want to play wedding games or funeral games and end up playing neither.

Yes, John and Jesus were misunderstood, and their call to living a life that truly mattered was evaded.

I have to wonder about the ways we fail to understand Jesus, the ways we fail to understand the reasons for dancing and the reasons for mourning. How deeply are we lulled by the songs of our culture: songs of individualism, success, money, power, control, pull yourself up by your bootstraps, and a belief that strength, might and determination solve all problems? How often are we lulled by power hungry voices in our culture telling us to believe that we do not need to care for the most vulnerable in our midst because it costs money, so we cast the least of these aside even though that might mean they go homeless, without health care and hungry while trying to find a way. How often are we lulled by narcissistic, self-focused voices in our culture, telling us it is ok to exclude and not welcome the other, cutting others out of the picture, whether it be globally, nationally, within our communities, even within our very own families? How often do we miss the moments in life that really matter? And, how often do we dance when we ought to mourn for a world whose burden is heavy? How

often do we dance when we should weep for so many people who need rest?

Well, Jesus turns away from the gathered crowd and offers a prayer that is rather jarring to our success oriented, power and control focused, wisdom seeking, intellect pursuing psyche. And, we discover that in God's realm, **all** those things that attract our attention, those things that drive our behavior and become the attributes we consider important, are barely noticed. In fact, they are **dismissed**. What is even more interesting is that Jesus' words indicate the blessings of God are **hidden** from the wise, hidden from the intelligent and sophisticated. Instead, the **infants** of this world, those who are innocent and naïve, those who are vulnerable, are the ones who **best** understand the ways of God.

You see, only the **vulnerable** are able to identify their deep need. And, when we are vulnerable enough to identify this need, the need for God's presence in life, it also means something must die and **we will be changed**. Oh, how we tend to fear that because it means **facing** our own messed-up-ness, **letting go** of our issues and facing loss. Yet, the truth of the matter is that, in doing so, **we will be made new!**

Here's the difficult truth about life in Christ. You cannot enter into it and expect to be unchanged. Which means a precondition of receiving Jesus – perhaps the **only** one! – is to recognize your **need** for Jesus. Forgiveness, when you think about it, is meaningful only to

those who have sinned, grace avails only those who are broken, and the promise of life abundant and eternal is only attractive to those who **know** they are dying.....Jesus knows that this kind of message – a message that is good news only to those who can identify their need – will be of little appeal to the self-made man or woman of the first **or** twenty-first centuries. But it is good news – unbelievably good news – to those who **know** their brokenness, can admit their need, and who turn to God in Jesus to be known, understood, and accepted. (Blog: David Lose *In the Meantime*)

So, at a time when we as a nation have just celebrated our strength, our might and power – can we not **only** give thanks for all that is good in our lives and in our country? But, can we **also** face our deep brokenness and messed-up-ness as individuals, as families, as communities, as a nation, as a world, and lay that before God? In the person of Jesus, God is calling us to come unto him. In the person of Jesus, we discover God in Christ not only enters into a messed-up world that is preoccupied with power and control, but is willing to **be misunderstood** and **become** vulnerable, even to the point of death on a cross, all because of God's deep love for a hurting world.

In Christ, we are called to turn again to the God who walks with us in our struggles, knows our pain and is present to us in our deepest despair. We are called to turn again to the One who calls out to us through Jesus saying, “Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a

real rest. Walk with me and work with me – watch how I do it. Learn the **unforced rhythms of grace**. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.” (from Eugene Petersen's *The Message*)

These are words that can touch the deepest part of our being. And, when that happens, we truly begin to **understand, not misunderstand**. We discover that we are truly known, accepted, and **understood** by a God of love, and this God will lead us into wholeness and life that truly matters.