

St. Lucas, June 1-2, 2019, Beatles Sunday, With a Little Help From My Friends

Sermon

"If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal," writes Paul. A Noisy gong, a clanging cymbal; these sound like ways some people may have described the Beatles when they first arrived on the scene, or rock n roll in general from its revelation less than a decade earlier. For millions, maybe billions of others worldwide, however, they could hear the love in the sounds and understood the new language that was being spoken. The result was transformational. Who woulda thought that 4 young, snarky English guys could have the impact they had, but such is the mystery of how the Spirit of God moves. And yes, I have come to believe that rock n roll is a manifestation of the Spirit of God. How else can we explain its capacities? It offers healing of our past, life and transcendent moments in the present, and helps us to move forward in hope. It transforms hearts and minds, breaks down barriers between people, builds communities, friendships, where each person is affirmed in their individuality, and places love above all things. This is what rock n roll has always done and continues to do. The Beatles perhaps epitomized such movement, but, it also sounds a lot like what Paul, the Apostle not McCartney, was describing in his letter to the Cornithians.

In this passage, Paul first gives love the utmost of importance. He really boils things down to All You Need is Love. Nothing that we can say, even if we are able to say it in every language, matters at all if love is not at its root. If we have the ability to understand fully the present and future and decrypt such mysteries for people, it doesn't matter if love is absent. According to Paul, even our faith, our belief, doesn't matter if love is not at the core of our living. He says even if we could move mountains with our faith, without love it amounts to nothing. Even if we do the right action of giving away our money and possessions, even our very lives, if love is not at the root of our actions, nothing is gained. All you need is love.

Paul goes on to describe love itself, saying that it is patient, kind, free of envy and arrogance, willing to let others lead the way, free of irritation and resentment, rejects wrongdoing and rejoices always in the truth, and it bears, believes, hopes, and endures all things. These too are lessons that the Beatles and other ministers of rock n roll have shared with us. They've been relentless in their truth-telling, and pursuit of being co-creators of a world in which people are willing to be kind and collaborative with one another, honest and truthful in word and deed, bear each other's burdens, and help each other to endure in hope. We get by with a little help from our friends, right?

Love, though, also helps us to recognize and embrace the divine that lives within us, and also in others. According to Paul, as things are presently, we are only able to see things incompletely. One day we will see fully, one day the full Reign of Love will come to be, but until then we only see things incompletely. We are able, however, to glimpse the image of our loving God within us in the mirror dimly, and, by extension, we are able to glimpse the image of our loving God within others as we see them. We may not become fully who God intends us, but something divine and loving lies within each of us longing to be seen and experienced in its authenticity.

Yet again, this was another life-giving lesson the Beatles and the rock n rollers have shared with the world: be who you are and embrace others for who they are. Being that I didn't get to experience the Beatle era, I am reliant upon books and documentaries to really understand what was happening, so I watched a newer documentary made by Ron Howard called 8 Days a Week, and Whoopi Goldbergh is interviewed. In that interview she described how big of an impact the Beatles had on her as a little girl getting to see them at Shea Stadium, which was a surprise gift from her hardworking mother, and that one of the biggest things they taught her was to just be herself no matter what anybody said, and that stuck with her...obviously as we all know how unique an individual Whoopi has been. Thinking on my own story of what rock n roll, not necessarily the Beatles, but others have meant to me, one of the most liberating things I learned was to be fully who I am, and to share that, regardless of critics or torpedoes, and I learned to appreciate others for who they fully and truly are. In so doing, I was, and am, able to look in the mirror and see the gifts of God that I possess, the image of our Creator in myself, and in others. The Beatles even managed to take that to a societal level as, perhaps at the height of their popularity in the US, they refused to play in segregated spaces in the American south. Well, naturally, things changed rather rapidly in those spaces as there was a lot of money on the line, so some of the first integrated experiences some folks had was a Beatles show, where folks were exposed fully to the humanity and divinity of one another in a brand new, life-giving way. Barriers were broken down, and a community was built up. But hey it's only rock n roll right?

So yeah, why does any of this matter really? Why does it matter if the Beatles and rock n roll are indeed sharing good news, Biblical good news even; why does it matter to our walk of discipleship now? Well, another thing I learned is that people saw the Beatles and their friendship, and they wanted friends like that. Naturally, as all friendships do, there were issues, but they were seen for years as a model of friendship. So, if these 4 friends, just by being who they were and sharing their gift with the world, even a gift some would call insignificant or meaningless; if they could have the positive, life-giving impact that they had and continue to have, well, what impact could a couple hundred good friends, modeling healthy, loving, friendship to the community have? What kind of impact could a couple hundred good friends have who are able to see and affirm the image of God in each other and anyone who enters their midst, regardless of how similar or dissimilar they are to the norm? What kind of impact could a couple hundred good friends sharing their gifts, whatever they may be, have on the community and wider world; even the gifts that some might call insignificant or meaningless? What kind of impact could a couple hundred good friends have by living in such a way that love is primary above all else, even belief; a love that compels us to reject wrongdoing, rejoice in truth, bear each other's burdens, and endure all things moving into the future together in hope? I imagine a couple hundred friends living like that, creating a community like that could have an enormous, life-giving, transformative impact...so, my friends, let's find out, shall we?

