

The Ripple Effect: Together the Change We Want to See

I remember, as a little child, tossing a pebble into a pond, and watching in amazement as the ripples from that one little action swept over the smooth surface of the water in ever expanding, concentric circles, until it reached the outermost edges of the pond. What I was experiencing is the ripple effect; the effect that one small action can have upon the whole.

We experience this ripple effect every bit as much in our human relationships and interactions as we do in the physical effects of a pebble tossed into a pond. Each individual action has a responding reaction that sends out ever increasing waves, amplifying the original. It ripples out, in ever widening circles until the entire environment around it is transformed. If the initial action is caring and kind, it will result in amplified waves of caring and kindness. If the initial action is mistrust and hostility, the ripple effect will result in amplified waves of hostility and mistrust.

There is a Cherokee legend: An old Cherokee is teaching his grandson about life. “A fight is going on inside me,” he said to the boy. “It is a terrible fight and it is between two wolves. One is evil – he is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego.” He continued, “The other is good – he is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. The same fight is going on inside you – and inside every other person, too.” The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather, “Which wolf will win?” The old Cherokee simply replied, “The one you feed.”

We are at critical juncture in our nation today. This election year has been one that has inflicted deep wounds and deep division in our nation. The election is behind us but the issues raised in the campaign have not been resolved. We stand at the precipice, and must decide which wolf we will feed. For those of us who want to feed the wolf of joy, peace, love, hope, kindness and faith, how can we be the change we want to see?

For me, as a Christian, that means living daily into the scriptural calling to Love God with all my being and to love my neighbor as myself, even when, and especially when that person does not look like me, or has different beliefs than the ones I hold...Love is not an option. That means willing the good of the other, no matter what. That means being the change I want to see: being kind, being compassionate, listening to those who differ from me, holding dialogue, and seeking the way forward together, by building bridges of relationship and reconciling differences.

In response to the violence that has erupted in our nation this summer, we at St. Catherine’s Episcopal Church have been asking ourselves, “How do we love like Jesus, across cultural divides of racism, sexuality, and religious intolerance? How do we love our neighbor as ourselves in these circumstances? We have listened to each other’s stories, and our hearts have been moved by compassion to respond to the concerns of our brothers and sisters who have different cultural experiences because of race, religion or

sexuality. We have prayed together, and shared dialogue together as have sought what the way forward might be. St Catherine's is just one pebble in the pond, but we hope to be the change we want to see, as the ripple effect of loving God in our neighbor expands from one person to another, washing over cultural divides, until we all become one beloved community.

We are gathered together tonight, people of many different races, people of many different cultural backgrounds, people of many different paths to God. May we listen with compassion to each other's stories. May we reach out in caring and kindness to those who are different from us, may we stand with each other respecting the dignity of every human being, and work together for justice, freedom and peace. May the ripple effect of this beloved community expand in ever widening circles until, together, we become the change we want to see.

Deo Gloria

The Rev. Susan Johnson
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