



Auburn Presbyterian Church

Passionately loving the Lord Jesus Christ and radiating that love to everyone

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“Why Can’t She/He Be More Like ME?” Genesis 1:24-28; 2:18-24

Professor Henry Higgins, in the musical *My Fair Lady* tells of his frustration with the student he has taken on as an experiment in social class manners. In the song “A Hymn to Him” he sings,

*Why can't a woman be more like a man?
Men are so honest, so thoroughly square;
Eternally noble, historic'ly fair;
Who, when you win, will always give your back a pat.
Well, why can't a woman be like that?*

*Why does ev'ryone do what the others do?
Can't a woman learn to use her head?
Why do they do ev'rything their mothers do?
Why don't they grow up- well, like their father instead?*

*Why can't a woman take after a man?
Men are so pleasant, so easy to please;
Whenever you are with them, you're always at ease. . . .*

*Why can't a woman take after a man?
Cause men are so friendly, good natured and kind.
A better companion you never will find. . . .*

*Why can't a woman be more like a man?
Men are so decent, such regular chaps.
Ready to help you through any mishaps.
Ready to buck you up whenever you are glum.
Why can't a woman be a chum? . . .*

*Why is thinking something women never do?
Why is logic never even tried?
Straight'ning up their hair is all they ever do.
Why don't they straighten up the mess that's inside?*

*Why can't a woman behave like a man?
If I was a woman who'd been to a ball,
Been hailed as a princess by one and by all;
Would I start weeping like a bathtub overflowing?
And carry on as if my home were in a tree?
Would I run off and never tell me where I'm going?
Why can't a woman be like me?*

(music by Frederick Loewe; lyrics by Alan Jay Lerner)

Yes, poor Higgins. He's engaged not only in a social class mismatch, he's also involved in "the war of the sexes". If you are or have been married, you know that marriage is a moral proving ground, a laboratory for learning to love someone, past the differences we all have.

It's common practice in pre-marital counseling to point out to a couple the differences between them in religion, class, family upbringing, personality, and the like. The more "different" the couple, it's likely they will have a tougher time in their love together; they will need greater communication and negotiation skills than a couple from similar backgrounds. And it's good to practice at working through conflict with any couple.

Conflict in marriage is more likely because the man and woman live under the same roof. Maybe that's why we have a record number of single-person households today—when someone ticks you off, you can just walk away to your own place, and pull up the drawbridge (or pull down the garage door) behind you! People do the same with churches. We don't handle conflict very well, do we?

Of course, there are other differences besides gender by which we can divide people. And once divided, we tend to assign different *values* to each difference. Tom Lehrer wrote a satire on all this with his song, "National Brotherhood Week". If you'll excuse the dated references, it goes this way:

*Oh, the white folks hate the black folks,
And the black folks hate the white folks.
To hate all but the right folks
Is an old established rule.*

*But during National Brotherhood Week, National Brotherhood Week,
Lena Horne and Sheriff Clarke are dancing cheek to cheek.
It's fun to eulogize
The people you despise,
As long as you don't let 'em in your school. . . .*

*Oh, the poor folks hate the rich folks,
And the rich folks hate the poor folks.
All of my folks hate all of your folks,
It's American as apple pie.*

*But during National Brotherhood Week, National Brotherhood Week,
New Yorkers love the Puerto Ricans 'cause it's very chic.*

*Step up and shake the hand
Of someone you can't stand.
You can tolerate him if you try.*

*Oh, the Protestants hate the Catholics,
And the Catholics hate the Protestants,
And the Hindus hate the Muslims,
And everybody hates the Jews.*

*But during National Brotherhood Week, National Brotherhood Week,
It's National Everyone-smile-at-one-another-hood Week.
Be nice to people who
Are inferior to you.
It's only for a week, so have no fear.
Be grateful that it doesn't last all year!*

Where is God in this picture? There's nothing of God in it.

God did not create us to segregate, discriminate, decimate or destroy. It's not God's desire for us to ignore each other but to enjoy each other—and that means, even with our differences.

Let's listen to what God tells us, starting with men and women who from the beginning were alike, but different. Open your Bibles to Genesis, chapter 1. We're going to read a portion of chapter 1 and of chapter 2. Listen with me for God's Word TO US TODAY, as I read these words aloud. [texts]

We have two creation stories here in Genesis. Some have suggested each one comes at the same process from a different view—from above, or from below. In the Genesis One account, God speaks to His heavenly council saying, "Let us make humanity in our own image."

"Let them take responsibility for the earth," as *The Message* puts it.

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." Both male and female together are "man" (this is actually a pun in Hebrew), and both have equal value.

In the Genesis Two account, the relationship is pictured as even more intimate. God starts with the male, and rather assembles creation around him. But in the end, there is no animal that is a fitting partner for him. So God creates the woman from the rib of the sleeping man—some say, God gave Adam a good ribbing--and when Adam (which is the Hebrew word for "man") wakes up, he has this delight standing in front of him, and he rejoices—bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh!

This intimacy, this equality, is indeed the image of God. Scripture teaches us that God Himself is a "three-fer"—God the Creator, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, all one God, as this symbolic embroidery tries to show. I think of The Trinity of God as a "yin/yang/yong"—the yin/yang of Eastern philosophy with a "new and improved" third Person. This is a picture of our God-Who-Is-Relationship in Their very nature. The popular book *The Shack* tries to put this in

narrative terms, to help us relate to this interpenetrating separateness of God, Who wants this kind of intimate relationship with us, too—and for us to have with each other, as Jesus said in John 17:20-23: “My prayer is not for [these disciples] alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”²² I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one:²³ I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. (RSV) Do you hear all the intimate relational language there? THAT’s what God planned; that’s what God made; that’s what God desires for us, and us with Him/Them.

But of course, that’s not the world we live in. Our own experience that tells us that, starting from our infancy. We have the daily news, from the local police blotter to foreign correspondents with video giving us gory details in “true High Definition”. I call this “news noise”, and it stokes our fears (and grabs our attention so advertisers can sell us their products more effectively). Our alienation from one another is “in our face” often enough that we can despair of experiencing this kind of intimacy with God and each other. And if it’s made harder by greater differences between us, then we give up sooner.

Most of us grow up with people like us, socialize with people like us, worship with people like us. We soon enough think the world is made of people just like us. And we get anxious around people who are different from us, especially if we are out of our familiar surroundings that give us comfort.

Those who follow Jesus are to build relationships with others that lead them to follow Jesus with us—to be disciple-makers. How can we do that if we are uncomfortable with our differences—small, or large?

It’s basically a choice—our choice (your choice, my choice).

Let’s take a spiritual direction moment. Think back to a conflict you had with someone—a misunderstanding, a conflict of values, a difference of perception, or a dispute over personal or property rights. Close your eyes for a moment, and put yourself back in that situation. . . . What was the argument about? What did you say? What did the other say? . . .

Now, bring Jesus into the picture. How does Jesus look at you? How does Jesus look at the other? . . .

What is Jesus saying to you about the other person—that he loves them like he loves you? . . . Rest in that for a moment. . . .

Come back to be with us now. Does it seem as though you have more resources to re-engage with this other person *in the presence of Jesus*, and work this through? Jesus is there to help you both. What might you do or say, to move the conflict ahead? How do you see the other person differently, now?

It’s a choice to “bring Jesus into the picture”. You have that power. And when you “bring Jesus in”, things change. You change. You have new capacities to care, because you are looking through Jesus’ eyes. You have new flexibility because your fears and defensiveness are

decreasing, and you have more “margin” to look for creative alternatives to the dead end you’ve reached.

Now you’re ready to meet with the other person to communicate clearly and to negotiate faithfully and respectfully.

One of the things I learned at the conference I attended in Kansas City is that “self-interest” is not a dirty word for Christians. (This is perhaps worth a whole sermon in itself.) I was raised to be a “good boy” by my parents, and “not to be selfish”. So admitting I have an “agenda” is very hard for me. Yet I do care about a number of things; I have values. Most people around me know it, even if I am in denial. It is better to identify that agenda and bring it out for negotiation, rather than deny it, or acknowledge it but keep it hidden in order to manipulate the negotiation.

Jesus repeated the words of the Law of Moses when asked what was the greatest of the 613 Commandments: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus did not say, love your neighbor; he said, love your neighbor as you love yourself. If you don’t love yourself, if you deny you have needs, how long will you be able to love your neighbor?

Of course, we have great capacity, don’t we, to fool ourselves, to justify ourselves, to fail to see ourselves accurately. That’s one of the reasons the “neighbor/self” commandment follows the “love God with all you’ve got” commandment. Ask God to tell you how well you are living Jesus’ words about self and neighbor. That’s the antidote for our self-delusion.

So we are to claim our self-interest, and bring it to the table to respectfully negotiate with the other person with their self-interest in mind, also. To negotiate means, there will be give-and-take.

And most of us have learned it’s best to search for a creative, win-win solution. Isn’t that a very practical definition of “loving your neighbor as you love yourself”?!

Here’s what I hope you’ll try this week: take a current conflict—or a relationship you would like to improve, though it’s not an active conflict now. Do what we did today—use this imaginative prayer method to “bring Jesus into the picture” of you and this other person. Rest in that. Imagine a new conversation, a new negotiation, with this other person. You don’t have to DO anything about it, of course. Just imagine and enjoy the difference that Jesus makes! (And if you find you want to do something about it, I can’t stop you....!)

Bring Jesus in. Love your neighbor as you love yourself—and start to enjoy the differences.