

## *What is your identity?*

*Genesis 45:3-11, 15 • Luke 6:27-38*

Never have you seen someone with so little to say so anxious to get up here to say it. You know, when I decided that I was going to do a service on Black History Month, it was seemingly a simple thing. I spent all week struggling with this, and then yesterday it just got worse.

The scriptures from Luke are probably some of the most troubling I've ever encountered. In the current times, people have been saying to me, "You have to pray for your enemy, Sally. We have to pray for them." And I say, "Huh?" That's all well and good, until their fist is in your face. So, I'm not going to speak for Black people, and I'm not going to speak for First Nations people, but I wore my comfortable sweatshirt that's all kinds of really colourful, so I can speak for me. And I can tell you, that as a person who has had to stand up to their enemies, it ain't nearly so easy as to just pray.

I got a phone call one Sunday morning at 9 am. Thank heaven I was in hospital chaplaincy at the time and I wasn't preaching. I was just going to go to church and participate in worship with a friend who was preaching. Turned out to be a really good thing: the woman on the other end of the phone proceeded to tell me what a horrible, disgusting human being I am. 9 am Sunday morning? Are you kidding me? And I did everything along the lines of love this person. And I finally said, "Hey lady, you wanna talk to me, make a date. I'll meet you for coffee." Because my loving was getting nowhere, and I just had to finally toss out a challenge. She hung up on me. Whew! That worked.

See, the powerful, or the ones who believe they're powerful, or the ones who believe they have all the rights in the world, or the ones who have all the privilege already, have had it figured out for over 3000, maybe 4 or 5000 years. Here's what the pharaohs did: the pharaohs decided, "Oh, I want that territory." So, they made those people the enemy. Now, raise your hand if this is starting to sound at all familiar. Those people are now the enemy, and we're going to go and get 'em. They're the enemy because they speak a language that is not my language. They are the enemy because they are a colour that's not my colour. They're the enemy because they don't worship in a way that I worship. So, we're going to go. The hidden agenda is: I want your land. Guaranteed. I guarantee you.

So Putin can say whatever he wants about the Ukraine; the hidden agenda is I want your land. The fellows – sorry, 'cause there's women there too – who are pretending to be geese in Ottawa...oh, and Coutts, and downtown yesterday, (I saw them all as I tried to get out of the city via a route where I didn't think I would see anybody. I was wrong; they were everywhere), do not know what it means to need freedom.

And so how, I ask you, do we love? See, I think that passage from Luke has been used to tell women to love their husbands anyway. Because after all, it's written in scripture. I know it's been used to tell gay people to love the authorities anyway, because that's what's written in scripture. I'm going to hunch

that it's been used to tell First Nations people to love the white folk anyway, because after all, it's there in scripture.

So I came with a little different agenda this morning. Martin Luther King Jr., I Have a Dream? Maybe our love is to have a dream. Maybe our love is to actually have the dream that Jesus had, rather than the supremacy that the authors of the scriptures seem to think they had. Or for sure, the religions for centuries have carried. (Boy, you've had me for two weeks in a row, folks. How are you doing? You get a break. Its okay – Karen's coming back.)

Martin Niemoller, from a concentration camp in World War II. Martin Niemoller was a Lutheran pastor imprisoned by the Nazis for something that some of us would call love; he called it resistance. In my book, it's the same thing. If we resist, we're loving ourselves and all of those who are in the same place as we are. And in the end, that's loving our neighbour, friends, because until all of us get it, none of us have really gotten it.

Martin Niemoller: "First they came for the socialists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a socialist. Then they came for the unionists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't really a unionist. Then they came for the Jews. And I didn't speak up because I definitely wasn't a Jew. Then they came for me. And there was no one left to speak up."

Love of neighbour, right now, in this day and in this time, is to stand up. Lord knows, our world needs a prophetic voice to stand and say, "No more!" No more to the folk who believe that the way to get something more in the life that they already have is to overthrow everybody else by whatever means. Which usually means guns, I notice. Why do we kill people who are killing people in order to prove that killing people is wrong? Love your neighbour. Pray for those who persecute you. I might be able to do that. Well, these days I think I'd be far better off if every time I felt the Spirit, I'd pray rather than get preachy. I yell at the TV a lot these days too. Just so you know, you're not the only ones who are getting it.

There are so many more important things for us to be about. And they are the things that the way of Jesus called us to and continues to call us to. So, the way of pharaoh was to create an enemy, go after the enemy, take down the enemy, and then go around and say, "Look everybody – I've created peace." The way of Jesus was to look around and say, "You. You need help. You...you need food. Clothing? Healing." The way of Jesus was to go around and find where there were cracks in the community of brokenness and hopelessness and helplessness. And fill the cracks, and then say, "Look. We can create peace. We can create peace."

My favourite quote of the week: "I'd rather have questions that cannot be answered than answers that cannot be questioned." My friends: Black history, gay history, First Nations history, Asian history, racial injustice – all of that history will continue to repeat itself over and over and over again unless we stand up. In the name of God, please, stand up. Say to those you love, "I love you more", and to those who are your enemies, "I'm going to love you until we see eye to eye. I'll meet you over coffee and talk about this. But you can't block the city streets."