

## Under Pressure — July 24, 2016

### Scripture readings

- Genesis 18:20-32 — Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?
- Colossians 2:6-15, 16-19 —

God made you alive together with him ☐ these are only a shadow of what is to come, but the “substance” belongs to Christ.

- Luke 11:1-13 — Lord, teach us to pray ☐ Ask, search, knock.

### Sermon Notes

This week, a parent was talking to me about the violence and hatred and divisiveness in this world, how crazy it is, and how it's beginning to affect her children. They are suffering from hearing and seeing all of this, even starting to expect violence and to fear the world is not a good place. Soon after that conversation, I read a quotation from a webpage called *A Small Fiction*. “People are still good, mostly,” she said. “That’s not what I’m hearing,” he said. She said, “Love is quieter than gunshots. But there’s more of it.”

I wonder if we can give love a chance — one more chance.

In the Old Testament reading today, we’re witnessing what seems to be the beginning of the transformation of God. Abraham comes to God, in his humble way. ‘God, I know the people of Sodom and Gomorrah don’t really deserve to live in this world, and perhaps it would be best to smite them all, wipe them from the face of the earth. But I think your commitment to love defies violence. What if there were 50 righteous, innocent people. Would you destroy them with the good?’ God say, ‘maybe not.’ Abraham goes on. ‘What if there were 40 or 30 or 10. Or even just one.’ And you see God begin a transformation into being more compassionate. Perhaps God is beginning to lean toward giving the people of Sodom and Gomorrah one more chance, trust love one more time. Perhaps we can do the same and change the world. But you know the end of the story. God destroys Sodom and Gomorrah, except for Lot and some others. Abraham wonders what God is doing. It would seem that Abraham’s prophetic plea to not destroy the innocent with the unrighteous was not heard by God. But God does hear and responds. The truth is the innocent do suffer with the guilty. This is one of the tragedies of human life. But it does not have to be that way.

In the letter to the Colossians, Paul tries to remind the people who they are. In the bickering and complaining and divisiveness, they are losing sight of what they were created to do and be. Paul reminds them of their connection to God, the mystical embodiment of God that is a part of all of us. He says, ‘you were created in love, and you are the substance of love.’ In this broken world, we might fall into a habit of retaliation or violence or hatred, but when we do we have lost the deepest connection of who we are, who we were meant to be in the world. Then, the question comes, what habits should we fall into, what habits should we commit to, how we can be the model of love Paul says we are meant to be.

In the gospel this morning, Jesus tells his disciples the proper response to the world we live in, the only way to change the world, is to get on our knees and take a still moment to remind ourselves of the love that is us, flows through us, has created us, and is ours to allow to inhabit us. He says you have to pray without ceasing. You have to ask. You have to search. You have to knock. With shameless persistence. Whether or not you know how to pray. Whether or not you know how to ask or what to ask for. We have to keep on and on and on. Praying with shameless persistence. Asking, searching, knocking. How could God turn us down?

Jesus continues to try to lead us into a constructive habit of love. Later in the gospel, he says ‘if you who are evil will give something good to your children ...’ The word translated as ‘evil’ actually means to be under pressure. It’s like being pressed down or pressed upon, as if under the thumb of a great weight. I changed the words in the reading to reflect the Greek origin: “stressed out and unable to see clearly.” It means we are blind in the pressure of life and have a hard time with living and seeing what is good, but we are still able to give good things to those we love. And if we can do that, to be sure God can. God who loves us and only means love for us can be there when we ask, when we search, when we knock. It’s not very loud, this prayerful approach to God. “It’s quieter than gunshot. But there’s more of it.”

I was struck this week by a song that came out in 1982, one of the greatest rock and roll songs ever written. The song was written by David Bowie and Freddie Mercury of the group Queen. It was called *Under Pressure*, and it was one of those songs I listened to over and over at full volume driving back and forth to school. Something about that song got into me, and I began to believe that song might be important for me, as a lesson in the gospel.

It’s the terror of knowing / What the world is about / Watching some good friends / Screaming /  
‘Let me out’ / Pray tomorrow gets me higher and higher and higher ...

Can’t we give ourselves one more chance / Why can’t we give love that one more chance / Why  
can’t we give love give love give love give love ...

Because love’s such an old-fashioned word / And love dares you to care for / The people on the  
edge of night / And love dares you to change our way of / Caring about ourselves

The song says, to care for the people who are on the edge of darkness, love dares us to change the way we feel about ourselves, and this is the last dance, maybe the last chance we get. We are under pressure. Is there any way you know of to release the valve? Is there a better way for us to not participate in the violence happening in our world and be, what our patron saint Paul calls us to be — a model of love to those who are dying from the pressure.

Ask, search, knock. Over and over and over. Love is quieter than gunshots, but there’s a whole lot more of it. And it’s worth asking for.

We can begin quietly in love and drown out all the violence, all the hate, all the division, all the noise coming from our TV sets. Do you get the feeling that if we give love one more chance, God will hear us?

### **Take-away**

Because love’s such an old-fashioned word  
And love dares you to care for people on the edge of night  
And love dares you to change our way of caring about ourselves,  
This is our last dance  
This is ourselves under pressure

<https://instagram.com/ASmallFiction>

Under Pressure: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a01QQZyl-\\_I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a01QQZyl-_I)