

Love Rises Again

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July 12, 2015

What the world needs now is love, sweet, love;
It's what there is just too little of.
What the world needs now is love, sweet, love;
Not just for one, for everyone.

Sound pretty sentimental? Offered the chance to be the first vocalist to record, Dionne Warwick turned it down. Burt Bacharach, the composer, thought so poorly of his product that he was very reluctant to have his orchestra accompany Jackie DeShannon, who did the first recording. But, when released, 50 years ago this past April, it took off and soared on the charts. Over 100 artists have recorded or performed it live, one as late as 2011. And it appears on the sound tracks of many movies.

How do you account for such popularity, when professionals thought ill of it at first? If you feel the words too mushy and, in spite of Bacharach's opinion, say it must have been the music, you may have chosen the same difference.

For music has been defined as "love in search of a word." Perhaps that is why it is considered the universal human language. It has even been described as the language of angels. Speaking of angels, I must share with you a delightful legend that came to me from a friend with her Christmas card.

When John was writing his first letter that is included in the New Testament, it is told that the angels were leaning on the window sills of heaven, watching intently as he wrote. Their bodies were tense and faces were anxious. And when he wrote, "God is love," they leaned back in relief and exclaimed, "They got it." At last, they got it."

But judging from the news a portion of the human race still "ain't got it." Our Gospel reading, the account of King Herod having John the Baptist beheaded, presenting it on a platter to a young girl, who presented it to her mother at the mother's request, is pretty gruesome, I thought. But the members of the so-called Islamic State took delight in multiple beheadings, video-taping the event and broadcasting the photos.

Across the Middle East, Africa and Asia, extremist groups kidnap, kill innocent people, destroy historic property and terrorize populations to cause thousands to flee as refugees to countries ill-prepared to care for them, taxing even the resources of the international community. And in the U. S. mass killings increase.

In our Service of Holy Communion, the Prayer of Confession includes the phrase, "we have rebelled against your love." I think we can say that a portion of humanity is in rebellion against Love.

Then, just as it seems hatred and violence have won the day in human affairs comes this news reporter's item from Charleston, South Carolina: Black and white sat shoulder to shoulder in Emmanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church the first Sunday following the murder of nine church members and mingled together outside when the worship service ended.

What a beautiful picture of white solidarity with their black neighbors. What a reaching out by whites to share in the grief and hurting of their black neighbors. What a beautiful unity blooms when love rises to the surface and enables people to cross boundaries of color and history.

I have no reported evidence, but I'll wager that the next Sunday, all were back in their separate congregations. The system of segregation will have trumped the inspiration of love. You may say, it's natural to want to be with your own kind. There's truth in that, but systemic segregation is the product of the doctrine of white supremacy and the African-American's inferiority.

But, hey! Let's not permit a project for the work of love in the future distract us from celebrating the inspiration of love in the present. Black and white sat shoulder to shoulder in South Carolina where secessionist fever spiked so high that it was the first state to secede from the Union and its firing on the federal Fort Sumter launched the Civil War! Black and white sat shoulder to shoulder in Charleston, an Atlantic port city where Africans were unloaded from ships and auctioned off to white plantation owners to slave the rest of their lives.

And almost immediately Nikki Haley, the Governor of South Carolina, called the legislature into session to

debate the location of the Confederate Battle Flag on government property. It was very clear that the flag and racial hatred were linked in the mind and motivation of the killer of the nine church members. He hoped to ignite a war between blacks and whites. No longer could the flag be seen as a symbol of Southern Heritage or valor of Confederate soldiers. It was what Blacks had always claimed.

Events moved rapidly. By mid-week, the Senate's first vote was 36-3 to remove it from the capitol grounds and consign it to the Confederate Relic Room. Deciding to make the second vote unanimous, they invited the widow of their murdered black colleague and pastor of the church to join them for the historic vote. Then, standing at the desk of her husband, the senators filed by, each offering her their condolences.

The House ratified the Senate vote and on Friday, the governor signed the legislation into law. On Saturday the flag was retired to the museum and the pole removed.

The Civil War spirit was alive and well a century later in the state, when, in 1962, the legislature voted to fly the Confederate Battle flag from the dome of the Statehouse. The purpose was to show defiance of the Supreme Court's decision that led to desegregating public schools and defiance of the emerging civil rights movement led by Martin Luther King, Jr.

In 1996, then governor, David Beasley announced that, after praying over the controversial symbol, he had changed his mind about supporting flying the flag from the dome and proposed locating it elsewhere on the capitol grounds. Outraged, the citizens voted him out of office when he sought re-election in 1998. But two years later he witnessed his suggestion followed.

Several senators said they could now how blacks viewed the flag and several said the families of victims forgiving the killer changed their minds, So, it seems a seismic shift may have occurred.

What the world needs now is love, sweet love. It's what there's still too little of.....but there's more of it in America than there was. For that we can thank God, who is Love.