

The Strength to Love

By

Ky Parish Perkins

Arlington High School

It's easy to love those who love you.

Try loving those who don't.

People whom openly and intentionally want to humiliate you.

To defeat you.

Ruin you.

Kill you.

The Bible's preaching to love one's enemies is often perceived as weak and cowardly.

Not for the strong or courageous.

Take Dylann Roof. He sat watching believers talk of love and biblical commitment during a Bible study before rising from his seat, pulling out a .45 caliber handgun, and shooting dead nine members of Emanuel AME Church.

The South Carolina Governor called for the death penalty.

The state prosecutor called for the death penalty.

Many people in South Carolina called for the death penalty.

The people who didn't call for the death penalty? The families of the people he gunned down.

The church shootings dusted off the national debate over the morality of whether we should kill people for killing other people but it was much deeper than that. To some families of the church victims, putting Roof to death is inconsistent with love and forgiveness as well as the notion that God is the ultimate judge and jury.

Not me. Not you.

"I do not think that God approves of the death penalty for any crime, rape and murder included. Capital punishment is against the better judgment of modern criminology and above all, against the highest expression of love in the nature of God."

Who said this? Dr. Martin Luther King.

He said it while watching civil rights advocates were being shot and stabbed and burned and lynched.

Hate is easy. Love is hard.

Hate is a journey that brings us ultimately to destruction. Loving your enemies is the key to the solution of the problems we all face.

Showing strength in love means learning the capacity to forgive.

It is knowing that those of us without the power to forgive are without the power to love.

It is talking about peace without preparing for war.

It is having a forgiving attitude towards the seemingly pure presence of evil.

King argues that only nonviolence means can bring about peaceful ends, and only through having the strength to love can reconciliation become a reality. In reading King's

speeches, it is easy to forget that his ideas of nonviolence and forgiveness and understanding were new. His ideology when pitted against that of the more militant Malcolm X is portrayed as a softer, even weaker mindset.

Yet in having the strength to love, one must have a tough-mindedness that demands a willingness to stick to one's conviction of forgiveness in a hostile environment where bombs can bring down planes, where terrorists can shoot up cities, where unarmed black boys can be gunned down by police.

Having the strength to love was the major difference between King and especially the younger Malcolm X.

To Dr. King, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness. Only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate. Only love can do that."

Knowing that and believing that is the real and true meaning of strength.