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The Hardest Thing in Church

So what is the hardest thing to do in church? My best guess is this, the hardest thing is to talk agreeably with people with whom we disagree. And why is it so difficult? Again, my best guess is that when you know the truth then it feels like a solemn duty to defend the truth and to attack that which is untrue, and any other kind of conversation feels like a betrayal of sacred convictions. The result is that when the other person, the one with whom we disagree, is talking, trying to express his or her point of view and how he arrived at that point of view, instead of listening to understand, we are listening for the sole purpose of shaping our own arguments in order to prove that the other person is wrong. The voice in our own head becomes so dominant that we simply are unable to listen carefully to the other person and a reasonable dialogue becomes impossible. If the other person has to be proven wrong before they are understood, then meaningful conversation is impossible. Mutual shouting replaces mutual understanding,

From time to time, I am overwhelmed by Jesus' commandments to love. I am convinced that we love best when we listen best to try to understand the other person and how she or he became the person they are. Quoting from memory, or perhaps paraphrasing, Jesus said:

- Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Or, as you wish to be heard and understood, try to hear and understand the other person.

- Love God with your entire being and love your neighbor as you love yourself. In the same way that you seek to understand and accept yourself, seek to understand and accept your neighbor.

- Love one another as I have loved you. This is the big one! (At least for me.) If I love you as I love myself, since I am often not very good at loving myself, then the bar is not very high for loving you. But if you and I are to love one another in the same way that Jesus loved us, totally, unconditionally, sacrificially, with an abundance of forgiveness, then the standard is extraordinarily high. This commandment was given on the same night that Jesus washed the feet of his disciples and told them to wash one another's feet. It seems to be a commandment given with the explicit purpose of telling Jesus' disciples how they were to treat one another. So Jesus is saying, take care of one another, listen to one another, understand one another, and forgive one another just as I have cared for, listened to, forgiven and understood you.

- Love your enemies! This one seems to go overboard, and the commandment is often very hard even to attempt to obey. But Jesus said it, so I assume that we are to take it seriously. You and I, as disciples of Jesus, are to make every effort to listen to and try to understand those whom we regard as enemies! And this certainly includes those with whom we profoundly disagree, both out of and within the church.

Am I suggesting that to listen and to understand the other is to agree? No. We may fully understand and still disagree, but we will better know the person with whom we disagree.

For what it is worth, I believe that Jesus is God's son, the one who above all others embodies the character of God. I believe, as recorded in John's first chapter, that Jesus is God's word, the final and ultimate expression of God's truth and love. And I believe Jesus when He said in the last chapter of Matthew that all authority in heaven and on earth have been given to Him.

So when Jesus tells us that we are to love one another, to care for one another, to try to listen to another to understand, and to forgive one another, I propose that we take Him seriously, as hard as it might be.

Executive Minister Search Update by Region President, Rev. Franklin Ruff



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ojFopBeQpVI&feature=youtu.be>