

“Dehumanizing Love”

John 17: Select Verses, Romans 8:38-39, 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 & Ephesian 4:20

Pastor James York

June 14, 2020

Prayer for Understanding God never let our reason distort your truth. Holy Spirit inspire us and reveal your will to each of us. Amen

Jesus prayed. **John 17: Select Phrases “I pray that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one, so that they may be brought to complete unity.”**

The Bible is full of stories declaring that all are equal, all are loved. Stories that grieve and lament how a person or group has been dehumanized, judged and separated, then God’s love proclaims that they are equal, they belong, their life matters, then God’s love reunites people together in harmony.

A devastating, destructive, horrible sin throughout the Bible is division, name calling, labeling, judging, sorting, blaming, dehumanizing. In the beginning God created Adam and Eve good and in the image of God. They enjoyed complete and perfect loving unity with God and each other. They sought to elevate themselves, to be more powerful, than God which resulted in distorted unity with God, each other and the cosmos. God still loves us and is with us and we often struggle to perceive God. Adam and Eve blamed each other, dehumanized each other, they no longer saw men and women as equal, jealousy, fear and hate emerged spawning attempts to have power and control over others. Cain and Abel’s dispute, whether it is better to be a farmer or shepherd, ended in murder. Dehumanization, division, and oppression became rampant.

Dehumanization involves name calling to manipulate others to accept behaviors, oppression, and violence that people know are wrong, unethical, and unfair. Dehumanization is anytime a person reduces another person to a single characteristic to justify hostility, greed, or abuse. A subtler form of dehumanization is defining a person by one of their attributes, diabetic, workaholic, addict, geek, athlete, musician. Reducing a person to a sole attribute robs them of the full complexity of their life. The opposites of dehumanization are empathy, love, respect, and unity. Dehumanization is us versus them thinking. Humanization thinking is all humans are us, equal and belong. Often dehumanization starts with silencing the stories of another, which enables one to suppress empathy and compassion. Dehumanization is selfish, seeing the world only from one’s own perspective. Humanization is love striving to see the world from multiple perspectives. We overcome dehumanization with love. Fighting dehumanization with dehumanization is a horrible spiral. Even your worst oppressor and enemy is human. We are to strive to call out their behavior, without calling them names. Martin Luther King Jr. said. “Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.”

Brene Brown said. “We must never tolerate dehumanization—the primary instrument of violence that has been used in every genocide recorded throughout history. There is a line. It is etched from dignity. Raging, fearful people from the right and left are crossing the dehumanizing line at unprecedented rates every single day. When we engage in dehumanizing rhetoric or promote dehumanizing images, we diminish our own humanity in the process. When we dehumanize a group, it says nothing at all about the people we are attacking. It does, however, say volumes about who we are and our integrity. Dehumanizing and holding people accountable are mutually exclusive. Dehumanizing is not an accountability or social justice tool. Dehumanizing is emotional off-loading at best, emotional self-indulgence at worst. And if our faith asks us to find the face of God in everyone we meet, that should include the politicians, media, and strangers on social media with whom we most violently disagree. When we desecrate their divinity, we desecrate our own, and we betray our humanity.”

God called and blessed Abraham and Sarah to bless all people, to humanize all people, to bring all people together in harmonious unity. After God freed the Israelites from slavery God urged them to humanize all people. Hospitality was to be offered to foreigners, immigrants, even enemies. Every fifty years was a year of Jubilee, a year of rest, including the forgiveness of all debts and the liberation of all people. God warned the Israelites of the dangers of choosing a leader that does not love everyone, view each person as equal and is weak in empathy, that is a dehumanizing leader.

God sent numerous prophets that named the devastation of dehumanization and urged everyone to repent, to turn to humanization, love for everyone and unity. Many tried to silence these prophets. They were mocked and ridiculed. Most in power banished the prophets, beat them and some were killed. Today peaceful protestors are our modern prophets calling us to lovingly humanize all people.

The woman at the well had been dehumanized for years. Jesus humanized her by listening to her story and giving her living water. The Jews and Samaritans were bitter enemies. Jesus with his Jewish followers stayed with the woman and Samaritans for two days. The Jews slept in the Samaritan homes, ate meals together, did chores together. They listened to each other's stories. They humanized each other. Together they came to believe the good news, the power of God's love to unite all people together in harmonious community.

The Apostle Paul wrote. **Romans 8:38-39 NLT "I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord."** Often these words provide great comfort assuring us that we are loved by God. These words are also challenging, for no one is ever separated from God's love. We are all united by love. Therefore nothing should ever separate us, neither wealth, nor status, nor health, nor gender, nor occupation, nor age, nor education, nor birth country, nor sexual orientation, nor politics, nor religion, nor culture, nor race, nor color of one's skin, nothing can separate us from God's love revealed in Jesus. Therefore, nothing should separate us from each other.

Jesus revealed the love of God. Jesus traveled with the disciples and followers, a community united by love, a community passionate about humanizing everyone who had been dehumanized; a person dehumanized as a demoniac, likely struggling from mental health, a woman dehumanized as an adulterer, a person dehumanized as a Roman soldier, a lady so dehumanized that she referred to herself as a dog only worth of scraps, people dehumanized as short, children, gentiles, tax collectors, thief, criminal, lepers, blind, deaf, lame, poor, widow, religious leader, mute, Canaanite, hungry. Jesus listened to their stories. Jesus shared meals with them. Jesus humanized them so they would be brought back into community, accepted and loved.

Jesus harshest words were for dehumanizing actions, judging, labeling, excluding, name calling. Jesus harshest words were for a religion that dehumanized by separating people, only priests in the holy of holiness, only the clean in the front of the temple, women were excluded to an outer court, foreigners excluded even further away. Jesus is God in human flesh, God with each of us, God with all of us, God uniting all.

The United States of America is founded on humanizing love. All are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

It takes widespread dehumanization to enslave a person. The arrival of the first captives to the Jamestown Colony, in 1619, is sometimes seen as the beginning of slavery in America, most likely enslaved Africans arrived in North America as early as the 1500s. White people have been dehumanizing Black people in North America for over five hundred years. I encourage you to watch the documentary the 13th. It seeks to tell the history of slavery, segregation, voter suppression, silencing of Black voices, legal measures that imprison Blacks and more. The 13th exposes how White people with systems of oppression continue today to deny freedom and equality for Black people. I found the 13th educational, shocking and disgusting. Study any metric, income, wealth, home ownership, unemployment, poverty, education, access to health care, access to vote, imprisonment and they all reveal how White people dehumanize Black people today. In the wake of coronavirus, a disproportionate number of Black people are unemployed, die from coronavirus and serve as essential workers interacting with the public. I encourage you to watch the movie Just Mercy based on the true story. I have spent the last few weeks listening to numerous Black stories. I am so sad that we have not overcome the dehumanization of Black people with humanizing love. We will never get to our founding principle "all are equal", until "Black lives matter". I urge you to listen to stories of Black people. I hope some of our Black members will share their story with us. Please contact me to share your story. I want to include your story in worship. Listening to the personal stories of Black people is extremely important. I hope all of us will find our voice to share personal stories, peacefully protest every form of dehumanization, to proclaim "Black lives matter", to truly be a united people where all are equal and free. Each of us is continually filled with the supreme force, love. Scripture proclaims. **1 Corinthians 13:4-7 "Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. Love does not demand its own way. Love is not irritable, and love keeps no record of being wronged. Love does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, love never loses faith, love is always hopeful, and love endures through every circumstance."** Let us join God in

celebrating the image of God in every person, rejoicing that we are all equal, siblings belonging to God's family. Let us share humanizing love.

Let us not cross the line of dehumanization, labeling and name calling those on the other side of issues. Let us avoid grouping people together. Those who are peacefully protesting are not those who are destroying property, stealing and setting fires. There are many police abundant with empathy, striving to love all people, to protect and serve. Police who kneel in support of equality. Police who march with peaceful protestors. Even the worst police should not be dehumanized with words like pig. Let us condemn the criminal actions of police and hold them accountable for their actions. Let us support police who protect and serve everyone equally with empathy.

It is never appropriate to use dehumanizing words, such as, thugs, illegals. It is never acceptable to "dominate" another. Dehumanization is a psychological process of demonizing a person or group, making them seem less than human and hence not worthy of humane treatment. Dehumanizing often starts with creating an enemy image. As we take sides, lose trust, and get angrier and angrier, we not only solidify an idea of our enemy, but also start to lose our ability to listen, communicate, and practice even a bit of empathy. Once we see people on "the other side" of a conflict as morally inferior and even dangerous, the conflict starts being framed as good versus evil. Once the parties have framed the conflict in this way, their positions become more rigid. In some cases, zero-sum thinking develops as parties come to believe that they must either secure their own victory or face defeat. New goals to punish or destroy the opponent arise, and in some cases more militant leadership comes into power. Dehumanization has fueled innumerable acts of violence, human rights violations, war crimes, and genocides. It makes slavery, torture, and human trafficking possible. Dehumanizing others is the process by which we become accepting of violations against human nature, the human spirit, and, for many of us, violations against the central tenets of our faith. Dehumanizing starts with language, often followed by images. We see this throughout history. During the Holocaust, Nazis described Jews as subhuman. They called Jews rats and depicted them as disease-carrying rodents in everything from military pamphlets to children's books. The Rwanda genocide called Tutsis cockroaches. Indigenous people are often referred to as savages. Serbs called Bosnians aliens. We are all vulnerable to the slow and insidious practice of dehumanizing, therefore we are all responsible for recognizing it and stopping dehumanization in every form.

In the fictitious movie *The Green Mile* John a loving caring compassionate man is wrongly convicted to death row for a crime he did not commit. John continues to love, care, help and heal others at his own expense. At the end of his life he says, "I'm tired. Mostly I am tired of people being ugly to each other."

The prophet Ezekiel had a vision of tired, dehumanized people, portrayed as a valley of dry bones. They lamented our hope is gone. They grieved our nation is in ruins. God sent Ezekiel to assure them that God will put the breath of the Holy Spirit within them, a breath of life, a breath of humanizing love.

Equal Justice proclaims. "Hope allows us to push forward, even when the truth is distorted by the people in power. It allows us to stand up when they tell us to sit down, and to speak when they say be quiet."

The Apostle Paul wrote. **Eph 3:20 MSG "God can do anything, you know—far more than you could ever imagine or guess or request in your wildest dreams! God does it not by pushing us around but by working within us, God's Spirit deeply and gently within us."**

God is transforming us, redeeming us, and fulfilling Jesus prayer. **John 17:Select Phrases "I pray that all of them may be one, so that they may be brought to complete unity."** Amen