

(7th Sunday after Pentecost)

The Psalmist, Dr. Seuss and God

Psalm 82

"How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked? Give justice to the weak and the orphan; maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked."

"Horton Hears a Who"

"A person's a person no matter how small."

The late Crooner, Dean Martin, sang: **"You're nobody til somebody loves you, You're nobody til somebody cares... So find yourself somebody to love."**

The Whos in Whoville were, as Dean-o sang, lucky to find somebody who loved them; somebody who believed in them when nobody else did; somebody who stood up for them, even when others overlooked them, and turned on them, even threatening them with violence.

How about you? Do you know someone who was a Horton-like person in your life? Somebody who stood up for you when it seemed as if the whole world had turned against you? Somebody who, when others made you feel "small" simply for you being you, loved you enough to risk taking a chance on you – in school, at work,, out in the community, maybe even here in church?

As I mentioned, Theodor Geisel's famous line – **"A person's a person no matter how small,"** came about following his visit with the children of Japan as he researched the effect the war had on them. His interaction with the children as he researched an article for Life magazine, had a profound impact on him and his world view. The people of Japan, who he had once viewed as the "enemy," dehumanizing them with racist caricatures of them in his political cartoons and captions, were now, he saw, actually human beings, just like him.

Through the smallest, most vulnerable of the Japanese citizens, the children, he had a change of heart and worldview.

"A person's a person," he realized, **"no matter how small"** or insignificant they may seem to others.

I think Jesus would have loved reading ***Horton Hears a Who***. Like Horton, he too championed the littlest and the least among the people. He stood up for those overlooked, cast aside and marginalized by society and the religious community.

Time and time again, we see Jesus doing the "taboo" thing of stopping and interacting with people who, because of their health condition or social status or religious black mark, were overlooked, cast aside, and forced to the margins of society and the faith community.

When others walked on by those who had leprosy or a physical disability, Jesus saw them, reminding his disciples: **“A person’s a person in God’s eyes, no matter what their health condition or physical challenges might be.”**

When religious leaders criticized the woman who anointed Jesus’ feet, as they had done with the Samaritan woman at the well, like they did with the woman who they said had committed adultery, Jesus reminded them, **“A person’s a person in God’s eyes, no matter their gender or sexual identity or religious law you accuse them of breaking.”**

And of course, when the disciples themselves tried to stop children from coming to see Jesus, he reminded them that **“A person’s a person in God’s eyes, no matter how small.”**

Jesus stressed this point in Matthew’s Gospel (25:31-46), when he said: **“‘I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?; Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these you did not do it to me.’”**

And when, as he was saying good-bye to his disciples, he left them with one final message, a new commandment that summed up all the other 10, and simplified the two greatest commandments: **“Remember,” he said, “this new commandment I give you. A person’s a person if you love them as I have loved you. By loving each person, your enemies included, people will come to know love, and in loving, know God.”**

Loving, honoring, respecting, welcoming, accepting, caring for and receiving each person, small or large, as if they were the very sacred presence of God, is how we are called by Christ to live in relationship with all people, regardless of how others view them and even how we might view them.

Where some try to enforce bans barring others from entering into “our space” because they don’t like the religion they practice, or attempt to build walls preventing people who they view as being less than human because of the language they speak or the way they look, we are called to stand up for them because in God’s eyes, **“A person is a person regardless of their faith, skin color, nationality or language.”**

When some are overlooked because they live on the streets, or stand in line to receive a meal, or wear our hand-me-downs, or are sick and in need of health care, we are called to hear their cries, reminding people through our public policies and church outreach that **“A person’s a person in God’s eyes, no matter their life situation.”**

Of course, it is easy for us, even as followers of Jesus, to forget this, to overlook another person, or see them as something less than we are, for many different reasons.

That is why the Psalmist sings out about God's justice and love in Psalm 82. The Psalmist is reminding his original audience and us that as God's people, be we rulers of the world who hold political power or have great wealth or are simply everyday people like you and me that we are to **"Give justice to the weak and the orphan; maintain the right of the lowly and destitute! Rescue the weak and the needy! (And) Deliver them from the hand of the wicked (or Wickersham brothers).**

God is love, we profess. God executes justice on the people, we say. Friends, God's Love is the same as God's justice. Love equals justice, and justice is love.

God's love demands that leaders, rulers, presidents, people in positions of power, or people, like you who sit in a church pew on a Sunday morning, execute justice as God commands of us.

God's justice is love for all people, no matter how small and insignificant we are told they are or we believe they are.

Our doing justice in God's name must be filled with compassion, empathy, respect, kindness, grace, understanding, forgiveness, reconciliation and healing for the least of these among us or it is not God's love.

Horton heard a Who cry out, and risked his very life and reputation for the Whos of Whoville, who seemed to be an insignificant speck in the minds of others.

Jesus heard the cries of the hungry, the homeless, the sick and outcast, those living on the margins of society, and risk his very life for their sake, suffering death because he challenged the political and religious leaders that, like Horton, believed that **"All people are people, regardless of how small."**

You're nobody until somebody loves you, Dean-o sang. Horton found somebody to love. Jesus showed us how to love one another. Will we take Dean Martin's advice and live out God's command and find somebody to love or will we just ignore their cries and walk on by?