

Luke 10:25-37

“Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. ‘Teacher,’ he said, ‘what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ He said to him, ‘What is written in the law? What do you read there?’ He answered, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.’ And he said to him, ‘You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.’”

## **“Outrageous Love”**

This past summer, I joined a group of McFarland teachers and administrators for a class on Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching and Learning. The book is written by Dr. Sharroky Hollie. He is the Executive Director of the non-profit educational center that bears the name of his book.

Our hope in reading and discussing his book, is to help us better engage our students who reflect a growing, diverse population.

Becoming more aware of the different cultural and ethnic backgrounds of our students and the linguistic and cultural challenges they face in a classroom can help us prepare more diverse, inclusive, equitable lessons.

At the core of his book, he lifts up the one thing that regardless of a person’s ethnic or cultural background or the language spoken is a desire to be heard, valued, and most of all loved.

Isn’t this true for all of us? All we need is, as the Beatles sang, is love.

Yes, love is all we want, to be loved, deeply loved for simply being who we are regardless of our cultural or ethnic background, our religion, our sexuality, the color of our skin, socioeconomic status, the clothes we wear, the grades we are given, the degrees we earn, or the jobs we work. We all just want to be loved.

Sharroky says, yes, we want to be loved, but not just with an ordinary love. He believes the love students want is something more, and the more love they desire and one we all want is actually an “outrageous love”.

This “outrageous love” he believes is culturally and linguistic responsive to the needs of all our students and staff.

He then quotes, Presbyterian minister Fred Rogers, yes, that Fred Rogers of Mr. Rogers Neighborhood fame, who spoke of love with these words: “Love isn’t a state of perfect caring. It is an active noun like ‘struggle.’ To love someone is to strive to accept that person exactly the way he or she is, right here and now.”

Sharroky then asks his readers what he says is a difficult question: "Are you capable of and willing to love outrageously? Are you willing to give more love to those who need it the most but are the least likely to receive it?"

Finally he adds, it will take your heart and mind (and strength) to be able to courageously give outrageous love.

Does any of this sound familiar to you? It should. Think about Jesus' exchange with the lawyer and the follow up story lesson offered in response.

While you are thinking about it, let me share with you the McFarland staff t-shirt that almost got printed. On it was an artistic looking heart symbol with the letters "MHS" printed in the heart. Below it in bigger letters were the words: "I give outrageous love!"

"I give outrageous love" might not seem so outrageous to you, but without any context, let's just say, teenagers might have a field day creating memes with it.

In the end, they dropped the "I give" and simply went with "outrageous love."

Back to my earlier question, do any of Sharroky's thoughts on "Outrageous Love" sound familiar to you?

If I had ordered one of the staff t-shirts, I might have given it to the Samaritan who Jesus says, using a different linguistic response from the culture of his day, gave "outrageous" love to a person who needed it.

Sharroky Hollis will be a guest at McFarland High School later this month. If I have the chance, I would like to ask him how familiar he is with Jesus' parable and his command to love one another? Because, his writing, in my mind, is paraphrasing Jesus' teaching. And that is a good thing.

"Are we capable and willing to love outrageously?" These words might easily come from Jesus' mouth when he had a student, actually, it was lawyer, who, like many students do with a teacher, sought to challenge him by asking "What must I do to inherit a good grade for all my life?"

Jesus, who some refer to as "Rabbi" or "Teacher" did what any good teacher would do, he invited the student (lawyer) to discover the answer to his question by telling him a story, which we refer to today as the "Good Samaritan."

It is a very familiar story to us, and one we know tells us that the two people who the original hearers of this tale would have expected to stop and help, pass on by, and with appropriate religious excuses.

The shocking aspect, and one lost on us today, but not to the original audience, was the Samaritan. As a Samaritan, who while being Jewish, came from a different ethnic group within Judaism. Samaritans were hated, despised, demonized, and considered by the privileged Jewish mainstream as less than human, and beyond being loved. The original hearers of Jesus' story might very well have booed and hissed at the mention of him.

It was the Samaritan though who gave "outrageous love" to the one who needed more.

As we know, as he finishes his story, Jesus turns to the student/lawyer and invites him to answer his own question by asking "Who shared God's outrageous love?"

To which the student admitted was the one who showed compassion and mercy.

Jesus then says, using Sharroky's words: "Are you capable and willing to love outrageously" like the one who showed mercy? If so, go and do likewise.

Are you, are we, as followers of Jesus willing to share such outrageous love for others?

Would we offer such outrageous love for the immigrants at the border who are fleeing violence and extreme poverty in their own lands?

Aren't we called to love outrageously those students and families in our schools and communities, even churches, that are facing food scarcity?

How are we called by Christ to offer outrageous love to the Afghan refugees who are now our neighbors up at Fort McCoy?

Are we capable and willing to give outrageous love by standing up and speaking out against the Big Lie and conspiracy theories being spewed by hate groups and some in political power to continue to marginalize people of color, making it more difficult for them to vote?

If we are to love as outrageously as the Samaritan, aren't we to have the courage to join together to stop the epidemic of gun violence and worship of guns in our nation?

Mr. Rogers was right, "love isn't a state of perfect caring, it is an active noun like 'struggle'."

To give and to receive "outrageous love" is to struggle for justice, equality, equity, by confronting the powers that be, and challenging and changing the systems of systemic racism and oppression, hatred and bigotry, and doing so in God's name.

We do so in God's name, because all each and every one of us want is to be loved, here and now, for who we are.

And who we are, each and every one of us, from all our different and diverse cultures and ethnic backgrounds and languages we speak, is the embodiment of the One Heart that beats in all human hearts. And the language we speak collectively is Love.

Outrageous, isn't it?!

Question for further reflection:

How does the command to love one another, a love that "does no wrong to a neighbor," shape your worldview (political, economic, cultural) and guides you in your interactions with people who you meet each day?

"As I teach, I project the condition of my soul onto my students, my subject, and our way of being together."  
- Parker J. Palmer.