

You may have seen in yesterday's paper or heard from someone else, that the lawsuit against the Cathedral and the Beacon has been withdrawn. If you didn't know for whatever reason, on the Monday before Thanksgiving Day a man who owns an office building caty-cornered across the street from the Beacon filed a lawsuit claiming that the Beacon was a nuisance that had adversely affected his property. The suit asked for monetary damages and for a permanent injunction stopping the operation of the Beacon.

The reason the suit has been withdrawn is not because our neighbor has had a change of heart or because the problems, as he saw them, went away. The reason is because we – the Cathedral and the Beacon – have committed to forming a neighborhood advisory council including neighbors, clients of the Beacon, and staff members as well as others. That council will meet on a regular basis to address issues that impact all of us. Two of our neighbors including the wife of the man who filed the suit, have already agreed to be a part of it.

It is a better way. The issues are real. Homelessness and poverty are conditions that erode the human spirit. For 2000 years Christians have responded to the imperative of Jesus. "In as much as you have done to the least of my brothers and sisters you have done to me." It is our mission to feed the hungry and care for the poor. That is nothing new. The humanity we share as children of God, beloved and redeemed by God, means that the poverty of one person is a poverty shared by all of us. If one person is oppressed and held powerless, then no one is truly free.

But even from a purely pragmatic, self-interest perspective poverty impacts all of us, the whole city, even if we go to great lengths to make it invisible. It is costly in every way.

And it is true that what we do has an impact on those around us. We don't live in isolation from others in any arena in our lives. We share a common humanity with all our neighbors.

It is a better way. A lawsuit by definition has winners and losers. But winning doesn't solve anything even if it moves the problem somewhere else and continues the illusion of invisibility. Losing doesn't change anything.

It is a better way, but it is not an easy way. It will take a lot of hard work and a significant amount of time. There will have to be open and honest conversation that won't always be so friendly. There will have to be trust among people who don't have a tradition of trusting each other. There will have to be compromise. It will even demand sacrifice. It will be a long road with many hills to climb. Success is never guaranteed.

Love itself is like that. The fantasy is that it will come naturally and be easy. If we love each other everything will just fall into place. But it doesn't really work that way. Love has to be nurtured; it has to be tended. It's hard work.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the early Christian Church in Corinth. They were a community experiencing conflict with several factions all claiming to have the truth and know the answers. Some were saying they were better Christians than others because of one reason or another. They were, to use Paul's words, *puffed up* because of their certainty about their own particular answers.

In the twelfth chapter of I Corinthians Paul tells them that there are different gifts of the spirit. Everyone has some gift; no one has all gifts. Some gifts are higher than others, and instead of being stuck in self-righteousness we should strive for the higher gifts.

And then Paul says, "I will show you a better way." Most Bibles put that line at the end of the twelfth chapter, but I think it more likely that Paul meant it as the beginning of chapter 13. "I will show you a better way – better even than the gifts of the Spirit. If I speak in tongues of either humans or angels and don't have love I am a noisy gong or a clanging symbol."

Without love nothing else works very well at all. It will always be demanding. It will require setting aside our prejudices and even our dearly held convictions. It will necessitate actually listening to each other even when we don't agree. It will often demand compromise and sometimes even sacrifice.

I have a confession to make. I wasn't optimistic about the possibility of moving forward with an advisory council and getting the suit dismissed so that we could start the real work. I thought the problems were too great, the sides too entrenched. I thought the gulf was too wide.

It took the optimism of a very good attorney who insisted that we had to try, always try one more time. I was wrong. I should have known better. The message of the Christian gospel is a message of hope. Someone said that the seven last words of the Church are: "That won't work; we tried it already."

We know better. I should have known better. The God who has redeemed the world through the love and sacrifice of the Cross is a God of second chances, and third and fourth. It is never hopeless.

It may not work, and then again maybe it will. But the ultimate outcome – the success or failure – of anything we do is not really the point. The point is that we give it one more shot in the hope and conviction that the love of God can change the world.

"Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch," Jesus said to Peter. You can almost hear Peter's sigh in his response. "Master we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet, if you say so, I will let down the nets." It is an act of obedience not hope or expectation. The fish just aren't here right now. Some days are like that. But, okay, I'll try one more time.

You know the story. The funny thing is it is no surprise. The nets are so full that they are about to break apart. The boats are so full that they have to get help. And then when they got back ashore they left everything and followed Jesus.

You and I have a vocation – we are called by God. It isn't just the Beacon or outreach or the work of a council or whatever it is that touches your heart and calls on your gifts. It is the vocation of love in all the places where we live our lives, day by day. It is the call to seek a better way, the better way.

It isn't just a matter of optimism; it is the faith that we know.

Amen.

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Dean