

**Year A, Epiphany7**  
**February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2017**  
**By Thomas L. Truby**  
**Matthew 5:38-48**

### **Announcing a New Freedom!**

This week I have been fascinated by a documentary entitled “Accidental Courtesy” that was aired on “Independent Lens” on PBS. Actually, I missed the program but have viewed several conversations with Daryl Davis, the subject of the film, on Utube.

Daryl Davis, an accomplished African American jazz musician has over the years befriended a number of Ku Klux Klan members who have become his friends. Because of his conversations and friendship several of them have quit the Klan and given Daryl their robes as evidence. By now he has quite a collection of Ku Klux Klan robes.

His connection to the Klan was accidental in that he first encountered one of their leaders while playing a music gig in a country music venue where Daryl was the only black man in the building. (This “accidental” encounter reminds me of how much of our life is determined by who we run into, who we work with, and who we get connected to through our families and the things that happen to us and who we worship with. I think God calls us through the “accidents,” the chance meetings, the contingencies on the road of life.)

The film is the story of how this “accidental” meeting with the Ku Klux Klan happened for Daryl Davis, and lets us sit in on a number of these conversations where Daryl offers the courtesy of a listening and relational ear to someone who sees the world very differently than he does. I say relational ear because Daryl does not just listen, he also challenges from his own perspective and he is a formidable debater. The film also includes a heated conversation with representatives of the Black Lives Matter movement who think he shouldn’t be talking to the Ku Klux Klan. They think he is aiding the enemy.

Daryl’s driving question is and has always been “How can you hate me when you don’t even know me?” This question got raised at age ten when people kept throwing pop cans and bottles in his direction while he was marching with the cub scouts. He was the only black boy in the group though at the time it never occurred to him that his skin color was the problem. He was a diplomat’s son and so was protected from some of the racism American culture normally exhibits. His question came when his parents explained what had happened and this question has remained with him throughout his life.

I can hear my 10 year old granddaughter asking this question concerning her school mates. How can some people hate them when they don’t even know them? She goes to an integrated school with a whole assortment of children that she has come to know. As is proper for a 10

year old girl she doesn't like some of the boys but at least she knows them. I challenge us to discover ways to come to know our neighbor who is different from us so that we will feel our common humanity with them.

I mention Daryl Davis as a dramatic and courageous example of loving your enemies. Davis claims that if you give your archenemy five minutes of your time, you will discover you have something in common. If you spend five more minutes with him you will discover two things in common. For Davis the commonality is often music, the universal language. People are surprised that he is as comfortable with country music as he is with the blues. He likes to point out that rock and roll grew from the mixing of the two. Where do you think Elvis got his moves?

Giving someone the courtesy of being listened too even when your own view is very different from theirs has the potential to change people, including ourselves. Davis claims that while he never set out to convert anyone, many have been converted away from the Klan after getting to know him. They couldn't maintain their commitment to violence and white superiority after having had real relationship with Davis. It seems to me that combining freedom of speech with Jesus' injunction to love your enemies makes potent change possible and even the transformation of culture. I know as I thought about this story I felt called to reach across all kinds of lines to touch those who are quite different than me. The call came from my curiosity about them and the Holy Spirit who calls to us through our neighbor and our enemy as neighbor. Even if they spurn me, I still want to do it. I am not very good at it yet but I want to be better.

Matthew's Jesus, the new Moses, said, "You have heard that it was said, *You must love your neighbor* and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who harass you so that you will be acting as children of your Father who is in heaven." Jesus is announcing a new freedom here. The law said you must love your neighbor and hate your enemy. You can't love your enemy. It's against the law. Daryl Davis can't choose to love the Ku Klux Klan. It's against the law. Black people can only love black people and white people can only love white people says the law. Your neighbor is defined by which group you are born into, who lives next to you, whose boundaries circumscribe your space. And these folks are the people you must love. You have no choice about it. It's the law!

Notice Jesus doesn't say you have to love your enemies like if you don't he is going to strike you dead. No, he just says "love your enemies and pray for those who harass you." He is announcing a new freedom. Ivan Illich in the book "The Rivers North of the Future" says, "A new dimension of love has opened....Before I was limited by the people into which I was born and the family in which I was raised. Now I can choose whom I will love and where I will love."

Forgive me for singling out one family in this church, but I have always been impressed by the way the Dumolt family has lived this ethic. While they were a Caucasian family originally, they chose to love and adopt children of African American and Native American heritage. They did not allow themselves to be hemmed in by their being white and exercised their Christian freedom to love who they choose to love. They also allowed themselves to love a woman who had been an exchange student with them who lived in a distant corner of Brazil and have visited her there. They have acted on their option to choose who they would love and where they would love. They didn't feel bound to love only their own even though who they chose was a strong challenge to the community. What kind of a family are they now?

Choosing to love beyond the communities love is deeply threatening to the community. Loving your enemy is an even greater danger to culture because culture is built on division. The glue we use to stick ourselves together is the enemy we all agree to hate. But what if some of us love our enemy? How will we remain close at the expense of the excluded if some of us chose to love those our culture thinks we need to exclude? Do see how dangerous following Jesus is? To follow Jesus is to build bridges and destroy divisions. Is destroying division a non-violent act?

This is Black History month. I purchased a book on CD entitled "Tears We Cannot Stop: A Sermon to White America" by Michael Eric Dyson and read by him. I am not listening to this book out of any sense of guilt or obligation or even because it's Black History month. No, a deep desire is moving me in that direction. The topic calls me. It's a grace I have decided to allow into my life. My black brothers and sisters with whom I want a relationship cry out to my heart. They are like the beaten man in the ditch and I am the Samaritan stranger to them whose stomach has twisted in seeing their plight. I am free to love them. Jesus said so. I am choosing to love them. I can love those many in my culture think are our enemy. God has called me through them, through the tough place they find themselves in and I am free to go to them.

To love someone is to learn all you can about them. I have seen "Fences," "Hidden Figures," "Loving" and "Moonlight" on the big screen and I am looking forward to seeing "I Am Not Your Negro" written by James Baldwin. I am free to do that. Jesus has set me free to do that. Amen.