

East Hartford  
World Communion Sunday 10/6/2013

Alice L. O'Donovan  
Psa 137, Lk 17:5-10

### Only What Love Requires

Imagine that you are having a conversation with Jesus, when he says, *"If the same person sins against you 7 times a day, and, turns back to you seven times saying, 'I repent.' you must forgive."*

How would you respond?

I suspect I would walk away mumbling, "yeah, right." I would need my patience and my persistence increased in geometric proportions, on my best days!

But, according to the scripture, the apostle's response was, *"Increase our faith."*

Increase our faith. To which Jesus replied *"If you had faith the size a mustard faith, you could say, 'be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you."*

Then as Luke tells the story, Jesus seems to totally shift gears. *"Who would among you would say to your slave who has just come in from the fields or the barns, 'go ahead get cleaned up. Supper is all ready for you. Sit down and eat, then fix my dinner.' Wouldn't you actually say to your slave,, 'fix supper for me, and put it on the table. Then when I've finished my supper, and it's all cleaned up, go home and fix your meal.' Do you thank him for doing his job?"*

*Likewise for you. When you do everything you are supposed to do, say, 'We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!'"*

We do not tend to think of ourselves as worthless slaves. We do not really tend to think of ourselves as servants either. The great social divisions of Jesus' place and times, were slave and free, female and male, Jew and Greek.

His disciples, the indigenous folk in an occupied land were males who not those who would have taken kindly to the title, “worthless slave.” Sure, they were not among the wealthy or religious elite, but neither were those fishermen and tax collectors as low as slaves, women or gentiles. *“Likewise for you. When you do everything you are supposed to do, say, ‘We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!’”*

*“Likewise for you. When you do everything you are supposed to do, say, ‘We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!’”*

It is, I believe, but a teeny tiny stretch to say, yes, we are to be God’s servants in service to all humanity, the language that we use in the communion liturgy, which is to say, we are to be slaves to Love with a capital L. With that, Jesus’ admonition to those disciples and to us, is to become able to say honestly, “we have done only what Love requires. Love one another as I have loved you. We are to become servants in service to all humanity, doing all, doing only what love requires.

Only What Love Requires. I’m sure you recognize today’s sermon title.

### Only What Love Requires

Now I am very well aware that those words make sense in church on Sunday morning, but I am someone who is much more interested in how those words, how those ideas hit the street on Monday morning. Church is a place and a time when we see and proclaim the great and abiding principles that shape our living.

Monday morning is a way of speaking about how those great and abiding principles shape and sustain us in our real lives and living. It may helpful to think of theory and reality. Talking the talk and walking the walk, individually and as a people?

What does Love require on Monday? Perhaps Jesus was not changing gears as abruptly as we might think. Speaking personally, Love requires forgiveness, which never means putting oneself back in the position of being injured or harmed in body, mind or spirit. But it does mean letting go of the urge to get even, the “you owe me,” attitude. Even more challenging, is the faith, the courage, the raw courage to say, “I’m sorry. Please forgive me.” Just putting that out there.

If Love requires forgiveness on an individual basis, what might love require of us as a people, as a state - the state of Connecticut, as a nation? When I finish this sermon we are going to stand to sing together a hymn written by Sr. M. T. Winter, a professor at Hartford Seminary.

She puts forward a vision of what love requires in terms of the transformation of the people. Had we read the lesson assigned from the prophet Habakkuk who heard God saying, we would have heard these words: “*Write the vision, write it large so those who run may read.*” MT has written God’s vision, and writ it large so we may all read. We have an answer to our question, what does love require?”

Take your bulletins, and follow as I read her lyrics aloud.

O for a world where everyone respects each others’ ways,  
Where love is lived and all is done with justice and with  
praise.

Oh for a world where goods are shared and misery relieved,  
Where truth is spoken, children spared, equality achieved.  
We welcome one world family and struggle with each choice  
That opens us to unity and gives our vision voice.

The poor are rich, the weak are strong, the foolish ones are  
wise,

Tell all who mourn: outcasts belong, who perishes will rise.  
O for a world preparing for God’s glorious reign of peace,  
Where time and tears will be no more, and all but love will  
cease.

You will immediately recognize that God's vision, the vision that MT has written large, this sacred vision requires some very difficult choices and therefore very difficult political work.

I remember listening in on a conversation with our lobbyist in the Connecticut legislature as she was describing some of the challenges and difficulties of her work with legislators. One challenge was her small budget. Never could our lobbyist be accused of gaining votes through sumptuous meals or luxurious travel to exotic places. Kim used to say that her entertainment budget would allow a few cups of coffee - that was about it.

More importantly she spoke of the challenge of getting people to vote in support of legislation that accomplished something only because it was right, rather than expedient, because it was loving rather than lucrative, because it would accomplish a sacred dream, rather than score political points. And if our legislators in Hartford need the vision writ large, our legislators in Washington . . .

Friends, there are many issues on the table, oil fracking, Tar Sands pipeline, repealing Citizens United, requiring labels on genetically modified food, gun control, poverty, and more. As a congregation we may not agree on any of them. As people of faith, we are called to Love's requirements, and Love requires political action.

Doing nothing does not serve love well - doing nothing leaves the death dealing powers in power.

So with MT's hymn "O For a World" echoing in our hearts, this week, let's get involved with an election, with an issue. Make a call, write a letter, make a contribution to the cause that you believe will help accomplish what Love requires.

Amen