

Coffee Connect | Diversity and Inclusion

SPEAKER

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Hello, and welcome to Coffee Connect, a Project Zion Podcast series where we share inspiring stories and thought-provoking reflections of life and ministry that remind us of God's loving presence in the world. I'm your host, Blake Smith. And Today's reflection is about diversity and inclusion. And it's called, "As Old as Time."

A tale as old as time, and yet, a tale that continues to be a reality in our world even today. On the surface, it's a tale of love that is prohibited for a variety of reasons ... a tale where persons from different cultures or walks of life, fall in love, in spite of the harsh opposition of those around them. But underneath, I believe there's a darker, more prevalent tale ... a tale of enmity, and hatred, and bias, and competition, and stereotyping, and "otherness." A tale that reflects divisions that it would seem we cannot overcome. And yet, as the body of Christ, the living breathing representatives and disciples of Jesus, we must overcome if we want to accomplish the building of the peaceable kingdom, the reign of God on earth.

The tale truly is as old as time. Perhaps one of the most famous tellings, however, comes from William Shakespeare, drawing on Arthur Brooke's 1562 poem, "The tragical history of Romeus and Juliet." Shakespeare brings the story of forbidden love to stage in Romeo and Juliet.

And though there have been many adaptations and versions of the tale, both before and after, another, well known telling of the tale, West Side Story, hit the stage in 1957. In both stories, we are captured by the budding romance that takes place and saddened by the tales endings.

But what about the real cause of the forbidden love and tragic endings?

Recently, I went to see West Side Story live on stage. So I had seen the production both onstage and in film, I was deeply moved by the seriousness of the hidden tale. The story within the story. I was particularly moved by the words of the female lead, Maria, as she stood over the body of Tony, gun in hand, raging at those who stood around in silence. Members and representatives of the two warring gangs who had let hatred and enmity, and racial differences and deeply seated prejudices guide their actions. She said in no uncertain terms, "We killed him!" She didn't place the blame solely on the one who had pulled the trigger. Instead, she acknowledged that in buying into all of the divisive rhetoric that serves to tear one person or group down in an effort to build up another, they had all contributed to the

tragic place in which they found themselves. Lives lost. Relationships broken. Diversity squelched. Inclusion non-existent. Sacred community severely limited, if not completely extinguished.

How long must this continue? How many times have we allowed a stereotype or misperception or tail determine our response and reaction to those who are or just appear to be different from us? When will we allow the love of God to fully transform us so that we might see others through God's eyes, and that we might begin to understand the richness that is realized when diverse peoples and cultures come together to share and celebrate the best of what they have to offer, so that all might grow and thrive.

Inspired counsel given to Community of Christ reminds us "it is imperative to understand that when you are truly baptized into Christ, you become part of a new creation. By taking on the life and mind of Christ, you increasingly view yourself and others from a changed perspective. Former ways of defining people by economic status, social class, sex, gender, or ethnicity, no longer are primary. Through the gospel of Christ, a new community of tolerance, reconciliation, unity and diversity and love is being born as a visible sign of the coming reign of God." Doctrine and Covenants 164:5.

"Be not consumed with concern about variety in human types and characteristics as you see them be passionately concerned about forming inclusive communities of love, oneness, and equality that revealed divine nature." Doctrine and Covenants, 165:3d.

Too many precious lives have been lost unnecessarily as a result of our unwillingness to draw the circle wide. The tale is as old as time and as current as the daily news. But until the ending is different, it must continue to be told.

May we be a part of the new tale that Christ has called us to tell? A tale that makes space for the reign of God? Have a blessed week!