

07/09/23

Psalm 145:8-14

Matthew 11:25-30

Love & Compassion

Did you happen to catch the article in [The Washington Post](#) this past week by Sally Jenkins about Chris Evert and Martina Navratilova? The article's entitled, "Bitter Rivals. Beloved Friends. Survivors."¹ Jenkins brings to the fore the back & forth tennis matches that competitors Chris Evert and Martina Navratilova played beginning when they were 16 and 18 years old respectively. The two tennis champs not only competed fiercely for the number one spot on the women's tennis circuit in the late 70's and through the decade of the 80's but also developed a deep and abiding friendship even amid their rivalry. The article then brings us to the 21st century when we learn that both supremely fit athletes develop cancer right around the same time and support one another to help the other through the most difficult phases of their respective cancer treatments. It's a beautiful tribute to the human spirit and how love and compassion triumph and reign supreme through rivalry, competition, and even through striving for excellence and being #1.

Show Evert-Navratilova photo

Several remarks resonated in the article (perhaps because I remember fondly watching many of the Chrissy-Martina matches) but one thing that stood out was when Evert noticed that she was still playing with a wood racket when Navratilova had already switched to the new graphite model and Evert chastised herself for not being able to make that switch sooner. Navratilova had

¹ Sally Jenkins. "Bitter Rivals. Beloved Friends. Survivors." [The Washington Post](#). 7/3/23

found a good racket, she discovered the right equipment that helped to propel her forward in the competition.

Remove Evert-Navratilova photo

In addition to The Washington Post I've been reading some fantastic novels the past few weeks. The one I'm currently reading and am midway through is, The Covenant of Water by Abraham Verghese. Don't tell me how it ends if you've read it. Part of plot takes place in rural India and the main character, a young man named, Philipose, has fallen in love with books. Philipose has gotten hold of a copy of Melville's Moby Dick and learns English by reading Moby Dick over and over with a local tradesman who helps Philipose understand the literary meaning and the English. Philipose then reads Moby Dick aloud at home to share the wonderful story with his extended family. When his mother asks him if the story about the great white whale is true, Philipose responds, "remember mama, fiction is the great lie that tells the truth about how the world lives. ... In fiction, the characters die on the page so that we might live better lives."²

I thought that description conveyed such love and compassion for the craft of writing novels and for understanding the world and the humans who live in it. I love the generous spirit in that description of fiction, toward novels, characters, and humanity that the author Verghese conveys through the character Philipose. That generous spirit toward novels, characters, and humanity led me to recall another novel I read which perhaps some of you have read as well, Demon Copperhead by Barbara Kingsolver. I learned recently Kingsolver modeled her construction and

² Verghese, Abraham. The Covenant of Water. New York: Grove Press, 2023, ch. 28

characters in Demon Copperhead after Dickens' David Copperfield. Kingsolver's novel is a loving tribute to her mentor and muse because emulating is a way of showing love and compassion for one who has helped her in her craft. In addition to understanding the love and compassion Kingsolver shows toward her mentor Charles Dickens, after reading Demon Copperhead the reader emerges with love and compassion for the deeply flawed characters Kingsolver writes about in Appalachia who have succumbed to meth and opioid addiction. The reader also emerges with empathy and anger over the impact and devastation big pharma and opioids have had on the region.

Turning to the Psalm Beatrice read, Psalm 145 which some scholars argue is the actual conclusion of the book of Psalms with the final four Psalms being a festal shout. It's thought this because Psalms 146-150 all begin with, "Praise the Lord!" Recall from last Sunday, *the festal shout* is that communal exclamation that **God is Good** and that goodness may be shouted from the rafters, or as we discussed last week may be acted out in more quiet deeds of service.

In Psalm 145 we're reminded that God is King over the universal and eternal kingdom that encompasses all of our living and dying. God is king over our coming and going, over fiction and nonfiction. God is king whose name is to be blessed and praised and extolled. Then the question emerges as to what kind of king is God? We discover the answer to that question in verses 8-9 which is the beginning of the passage Beatrice read & is our passage for today:

Show slide Psalm 145:8-9

“The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The Lord is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made.”

That is a clear answer to our question. God is good and gracious and is a God of *love and compassion*. Reading further on in the Psalm in verse 14 we learn that God has special *love and compassion* for all who are falling and raises up all who are bowed down.

Show slide Psalm 145:14

There is an extra measure of *love and compassion* from this mighty king for those who are weary and carrying heavy burdens.

The *love and compassion* from the creator and almighty God that we read about in Psalm 145 correlates with our Gospel reading. In Matthew’s Gospel we are treated to one of the most beloved and tender passages in all of scripture. It’s as though Jesus can see directly into the heart of humanity and respond with words that every person no matter the age or stage of life, no matter the rank or race, no matter the gender or genealogy, every person needs to hear at some point. Is there ever a time when you or I don’t need to hear these loving and compassionate words and receive God’s generous spirit with grace?

Show slide Matthew 11:28-30

Jesus says, “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

The one we read about in Psalm 145, the Lord who is gracious and merciful slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, the Lord who is good to all and has compassion over all that he has made, that one speaks aloud in Matthew’s Gospel with these same words of *love and compassion* for all who will listen.

In these verses Jesus does not propose that we go yoke-less, but that we accept his yoke. A yoke usually joins two oxen together to work as a team. Recall that a well-made yoke distributes the load evenly, making the task easier. A well-fitted yoke follows the contours of the oxen's neck so that it does not rub or chaff.

Show photo of yoke of oxen

When Jesus invites us to take his yoke and to learn from him, he is inviting us to join him in harness — to allow him to take the lead — to let him help us through difficult places — to give him the opportunity to show his generous spirit, his *love and compassion*.

For a contemporary analogy, consider the advantages of new, high-tech, athletic equipment. A hiker can go faster, further, and more easily when equipped with a well-engineered backpack, a tiny camp stove, freeze dried food, and a featherweight tent. New advances in tennis racquets,

skis, golf clubs, and running shoes help athletes to set new records. I was reminded of Chris Evert's comment about not switching early enough to the graphite racket which she felt may have put her at a disadvantage in her quest toward securing the top spot.

Tennis photo

I well recall playing with wooden rackets which clearly are not the new equipment that are necessary for tennis today. None of that equipment allows the athlete to win the game while sitting on the sidelines, but each enhances the athlete's performance on the court or in the wilderness or on playing field. When Jesus invites us to take his yoke and to learn from him, it is as if he is giving us access to the finest equipment and the best coaching for the game of life and the joy of living.

Remove Tennis photo

I wonder if you might be going through a difficult period. I wonder if you are weary or you know someone who is and are walking alongside that person. Is there cancer in your family or an illness that's knocking at the door or perhaps wreaking havoc? Addictions are not limited to Appalachia. Do you know someone who's carrying the burden of alcohol, meth, porn, gambling, or another addition?

Scripture tells the truth about our lives and tells the truth about God. When the Psalmist says that the Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and

compassion for all that the Lord has made, we can trust the truth of that word. When Jesus says, come to me all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens, we can trust that gracious invitation. When Jesus says, take my yoke upon you and learn from me he's giving us the equipment we need to move forward with love and compassion.

Our Lord is in it for the long haul. Longer than the Chrissy-Martina rivalry, friendship and support. He has full confidence in the human spirit if he can say this to you and to me—come to me, take my yoke, learn from me.

What do you need to receive that *love and compassion* for you, today?

What is our response to this love divine?

Let us stand and sing together our response as we sing the first 2 verses of hymn #366 *Love Divine All Love's Excelling*