

"New Math"

Prayer: Your Word O Lord, gives life. May our hearts be open to hear your word spoken this day, and may we leave this sanctuary with renewed hearts.

So Donald Trump, Vladimir Putin, and Justin Trudeau were at one of those innumerable world leader conferences they hold.

While the politicians were there a group of United Nations scientists ran an experiment to test the intelligence of the leaders of the industrialized world.

They began by asking a simple math question to Donald Trump.

"How much is three times three" (3X3)

Donald, who isn't the sharpest knife in the drawer, counted on his fingers, mumbled under his breath, drew figures in the air, erased them, wrote some others, and finally answered "74".

The scientists sort of gasped, but recorded the answer.

Then they turned to Vladimir Putin....*"how much is 3 X 3"*

Putin became quiet as he thought for long moments.

He rubbed his chin, scratched his head, blew his nose and finally answered *"Tuesday!"*

The experts could hardly contain themselves. Clearly they had discovered that, when it came to politicians, the proverbial Bell curve was nothing more than a flat line.. but there was one more chance.

They turned to Justin Trudeau... *"How much is 3 X 3?"*

Almost immediately, and with a bright grin, Justin answered "9".

The scientists were shocked! They were amazed that he knew the answer. So they asked Justin *"after the pitiful performance of your colleagues, how did YOU come up with the correct answer of 9?"*

Justin giggled and said *"That was easy,*

I just subtracted 74 from Tuesday"

By now, life has probably taught you that things don't always add up the way we want them to.

There is a "buzz" word in the business community right now that is getting a lot of use. The word is "synergy".

Synergy means that the effect of combining several things together is greater than their individual effects.

In other words, $1 + 1$ is sometimes greater than 2.

Think of a band - drums, guitars, keyboard etc... the combined effect of the band is greater than the individual band members.

The word synergy is often used with drugs... the combined effects of two drugs is greater than the individual effect of each drug on its own.

A child is a synergy.... a child has both mom and dad's gene's but a child is not merely the sum of its parents... the kid may look like dad and sound like mom, but if you look closely, you realize that each child is a unique person, they are much more than merely mom plus dad.

That math brings us to our scripture lesson today....

Jesus and the disciples had arrived at Jerusalem for the Passover festival.

While they were there some Greek people approached the disciples. "*We want to see Jesus*" they tell Philip, Philip tells Andrew and together they go and tell Jesus.

And when they tell Jesus he gets this "look" in his eye.

It's as if, in the arrival of these Greeks, a long-awaited sign has finally appeared.

Jesus - recognizing the sign announces: "*the hour has come... for the son of man to be glorified*"

With the arrival of the Greeks the countdown had begun.

It was T-minus not too many days or hours

before Jesus would go the cross, die, and be raised.

The chain of events leading to his passion had now begun.

What was so important about the Greeks that they signalled the beginning of the end for Jesus' earthly ministry?

Fred Craddock calls us to look at the context of the stories preceding today's lesson.

Today's scripture lesson follows immediately after the triumphal entry into Jerusalem which we will read NEXT week. (don't ask me to explain the logic of the common lectionary)

So Jesus has just entered Jerusalem to the cheering of the crowds, and the Pharisees are bewildered by the positive response of the crowd.

The Pharisees say: *"Look, the whole world has gone after him!"*

A bit of hyperbole, but obviously an impressive crowd.

The phrase "whole world" is a bit prophetic.

This observation ties in with the unwitting prophecy made by Caiaphas, the high priest in chapter 11.

There Caiaphas *"prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the children of God who are scattered throughout the world."*

When Jesus reacts to the arrival of these foreigners, he is revealing much more than the fact that he will soon die.

Jesus is telling us that the time is right for his ministry of grace to break out of the narrow confines of Galilee and Judea.

It was time for God's salvation to expand to the whole world and to all people. Jesus could no longer be contained by time or space or culture.

In that moment, when the foreigners came to Jesus, he said something about what his death would enable him to do.

Jesus said:

"And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself"

Hum.... that sounds like new math to me.

The Jehovah's Witnesses were going door to door in our neighbourhood last week. I don't know why they bother.

According to the teachings of the Jehovah's Witnesses Jesus is not going to draw ALL people to himself, only 144,000 people and of course, those 144,000 will be Jehovah's Witnesses.

But what about the other 2 million adherents they have world wide - what is Jesus going to do with them?? According to their math the equation should read *"and when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw 144,000 Jehovah's Witnesses to myself"*

But that's NOT what Jesus said.

There are many devoted fans of writers like Hal Lindsay and Tim LeHaye who write about the 2nd coming of Christ. They don't believe that Jesus will draw all people to himself either. Only those who correctly understand the signs of the times and the correct interpretations of the biblical prophecies will be raptured to heaven.

Everyone else will have to endure the great tribulation, and although they will have a chance to repent, most won't and will be thrown into the lake that burns with fire.

People who live with this theology seem to be interpreting Jesus' words so that it sounds more like *"when I am lifted up I will draw all people to myself... but most people can't come"*

But that's NOT what Jesus said.

Some Christians have a really hard time believing that Jesus will draw to himself anyone who isn't a Pentecostal or Roman Catholic or Fundamentalist Baptist or some other denomination.

And most of us can add our own restrictions

"and when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself...except for the atheists, or Muslims or people on death row or homosexuals or drug addicts or" well, add your own exclusion.

The idea that Jesus will draw ALL PEOPLE to himself just doesn't add up in our judgmental attitudes.

But there he is, in the company of his disciples, and he is pointing to those Greek foreigners and saying : *"see, when I am lifted up, I will draw all people to myself"*

So how do we get past our limited and judgemental attitudes?

Well, I think we need to commit ourselves to believing
that Jesus is drawing all people to himself.

If we can do that then we'll discover that we have much more in common
with others than we want to admit,
and those common things can bring God's love and grace in to our lives.

November 1999, Egypt-Air flight 990 crashed into the Atlantic Ocean off the
coast of Nantucket Island killing all on board.

A woman names Andrea Gouze was asked to be one of the spiritual care
team organized by the Red Cross.

In the days following the crash the families of those who died began to
gather in Newport. Andrea felt strangely out of place, given the fact that
most family members were Muslim and Andrea was a Jew, and a Rabbi as
well.

All of Andrea's misgivings were erased one afternoon when she
encountered a Muslim woman who had just viewed some of the recovered
aircraft wreckage. The woman came out of the hanger and began to sob
uncontrollably. She began to wail for her young daughter who had been
killed.

Rabbi Andrea, wearing the kippa, took the Egyptian woman into her arms. And there, in view of the whole world, a Muslim woman and a Jewish rabbi stood in a silent embrace, crying together.

Andreas later wrote: *"not sharing a language, we didn't speak, but there was no need for words....everyone cries in the same language"*

Like that Muslim woman who wailed for her daughter,
the cross show us a God who - like every parent who loses a child,
like every person who has lost a loved one,
stands among us in pain and sorrow, crying,
and opening His arms to draw all people to him.

At the cross, we learn to speak the language of God,
and so we can begin to talk to people
who we otherwise wouldn't talk to.

If we believe that God is drawing all people to God-self through Jesus then we are compelled to stop giving up on people.

A woman by the name of Martha Beck wrote a book about her son Adam.

Adam was born with Down's Syndrome.

Martha writes that, when Adam was 3 years old,

she began to lose hope that he would ever communicate verbally.

His inability to speak was frustrating for him, and it broke Martha's heart.

She worked with him for hours, doing the exercises the speech therapists had taught her, with no success at all.

One day, after hours of unsuccessful therapy, Martha hit a new low.

She gathered up Adam and his 2 sisters and took them to the grocery store.

She was exhausted and so offered them candy bribes to get some peace and calm.

Each girl picked some candy, but Adam went over to the basket of red rosebuds and pulled one out.

"This is what you want?" Martha asked incredulously.

Adam nodded. *"No, honey, this isn't candy"* his mother said, putting it back and turning him to the row of sweets.

Adam shook his small head, walked back to the bucket, picked out the rose and put it on the counter.

Martha was baffled, but paid for it. Later, as the girls unwrapped their candy in the car, Adam just sat there, holding the rose.

When they got home, the kids disappeared, and Martha went about putting the groceries away. Later, they all went to bed.

The next morning, Martha awoke to a sunny day.

Her husband had already left for work and she could hear the two girls talking quietly in their room.

Then she heard Adam's small feet padding down the hallway.

The door opened, and he appeared.

He was still holding the rose. But it was different.

Adam had put the rose into a small crystal vase.

Martha was surprised.

She didn't realize that Adam knew what vases were for, let alone how to get one down from the cupboard, fill it with water, and put a flower in it.

Adam walked over to the bed and handed his mother the rose.

And then, as he held it out, in a clear, calm voice

Adam miraculously said "*Here*".

Martha stared at Adam.

He looked back at her with steady eyes.

And then she knew what she should have remembered

- that her son Adam had a soul that she could hardly comprehend,
and that he was trying to tell her that he was sorry for the pain

she felt trying to turn him into a "normal" child,

and that he loved her despite **her** many disabilities.

Then Martha writes, Adam turned around, ;his little blue pajamas dragging a bit on the floor, and padded out of the room.

Have you ever looked at another person and seen - not what you thought was their flaw, but their *soul*?

The love God wills for us is the kind of love that is able to see through the veil of human frailty,

of human disability,

of human weakness,

and even human sin

to see something deeper

- something theologians describe as "the image of God"

When we begin to relate to others - not on the basis of what's on the outside,

but on the basis of what God is doing on the inside,

we receive power to help Jesus draw people to God.

That's the power of the cross.

Finally, when we take hold of the promise that Jesus is drawing *all people* to himself,

we come face to face with the meaning of the cross for ourselves.

The bottom line is that - to follow Jesus, we must die to our old math, and be born to God's new math.

We must die to our old ideas, and be born to God's new ideas.

We must die to those things within ourselves that seek to limit God's grace

and be born to a willingness to allow God's grace

to break out to everyone, everywhere!

We are entering a new week,
are you willing to learn God's new math??

God has promised to be with us,
to help us learn,
and to draw us closer to Jesus.

And for this Good News, we say thanks, and praise be to God!

Let us pray:

Okay God, I'm not very good at regular-everyday math,
so I haven't got a hope of applying your new math to my life
without your help.

Please be with each one of us this week, that as we struggle with your new
math of inclusive love, we can draw new people to you through Jesus.

Amen