

---

## *It Sometimes Happens that Somebody Likes Somebody*

**A sermon by the Rev. Dr. Thee Smith**  
**The Feast of St. Philip – Year A**

In the name of God: Our Maker, Redeemer, Defender, and Friend. Amen.

For many years now I've been active in a peer counseling community\* that excels in getting ordinary people like you and me to like one another. Not only that, however. We also work with each other on best practices for learning how to like other people who are not like us: people we typically regard as extraordinarily unlikable.

Now here's just one of our practices that I've found be remarkably effective. Over and over again we give each other counseling sessions in which we explore what's going-on with me, for example, that gets in my of liking this person or that person. Instead of what's wrong or off-putting about the other person, their group or people like them, we shift the attention to what are our issues that keep us from noticing or appreciating even the smallest things that might let us see how they could be regarded as worthy of our attention, respect, or thoughtful regard.

Certainly it's not always easy. Of course there are people who seem completely out of reach for our tolerance or care. But for all 'sorts and conditions' of persons we have come up with the same generic approach that I've found to be remarkably inclusive and effective.

It involves repeating a single sentence over and over again at the same time that I take into consideration all the possible reasons why I might be able to like someone that I don't yet like or even actively dislike.

Here's the sentence that seems at first so simple-minded, even perhaps absurd or amusing, but slowly begins to work a little magic. And in a few minutes I'll say how it connects to our scriptures for today. But first the sentence is:

It sometimes happens that somebody likes somebody.

That's right; it's as simple as that: 'It sometimes happens that somebody likes somebody.'

Go ahead. Repeat it silently to yourself, if you like, while I intone it as follows:

'It sometimes happens / that somebody / likes somebody.'

Now something that might seem humorous about that statement is that we tend to take it for granted that people are liking each other all the time. It's so ordinary and commonplace; so why are we making such a big deal out of it? But in my counseling practice we encourage one another to use that phrase to notice something compelling about every human being whom we would otherwise dislike and neglect or ignore.

What's compelling is the intrinsic love-ability of people generally—apart from our particular likes and dislikes. This is the love-ability that Louis Armstrong celebrates in that classic song he has popularized: "It's a Wonderful World.

The colors of the rainbow so pretty in the sky  
Are also on the faces of people going by

I see friends shaking hands saying how do you do  
They're really saying I love you ...

And I think to myself what a wonderful world  
Yes I think to myself what a wonderful world.

Yes!—as we're meeting and greeting each other in ordinary way oftentimes what we're really say, the song proclaims, is 'I love you.' And that's part of what makes it a wonderful world, right?

But here of course we all know reasons why this is not a wonderful world for so many human beings. And to make it personal we know intimately too many occasions when we are part of making it not a wonderful world for other people. Yet those could also provide the occasions when the person I'm neglecting or despising right here or right there suddenly becomes a candidate for being liked—just because, well, because:

It sometimes happens that somebody likes somebody.

In our counseling practice that question becomes profound when we allow it to confront all the so-called reasons that we dislike or neglect this person or that: this person is too much like that, or that person isn't enough of this, and so on **again and again**. And remarkably something begins to shift. Like a mantra the phrase begins to work its magic so that I began to reconsider persons and groups I had formerly—all under the pressure of asking and answering the question:

What gets in my way of being that someone for whom it can be said:  
'it sometimes happens that somebody likes somebody?'

What's *my* problem, not theirs?

In that connection I'm here reminded of that old gospel song: "It's me, it's me, it's me, O Lord, standing in the need of prayer ..."

It's not my mother, not my father, but it's me O Lord, standing in the need of prayer.

Not my sister, not my brother, but it's me O Lord, standing in the need of prayer...

Not the teacher, not the preacher, but it's me O Lord, standing in the need of prayer...

So right we can go directly to the point of conviction, and say something honestly to ourselves that we might too easily make little of or ignore. What we might too easily discount or ignore is that there are myriads of people whom we routinely or typically or chronically despise or discount. They are like the verses that immediately precede the verses that we heard in our reading from Isaiah 53 earlier, which I paraphrase as follows:

They have no form or beauty that we should look at them,  
nothing in their appearance that we should desire them ...  
and as one from whom others hide their faces  
they are despised, and we hold them of no account. (Isaiah 53.2-3)

So who have *we* been despising, secretly or overtly, and 'holding of no account?' Who are the kind of people who for us have 'no form or beauty that we should look at them? — nothing in their appearance that we should desire them? —and from who we hide our faces ... holding them of no account?'

Across all the differences of nationality, race, and sexuality, in today's reading from the Book of Acts, Philip the deacon walks up to that chariot and agrees to 'bring the stranger to baptism.' Yes, there are lots of issues that separated them—issues involving different ethnicities, nationalities, and—yes, different sexual identities in the case of the man identified as a eunuch. But Philip allowed none of that to get in his way, as the Collect appointed for today declares:

Holy God, no one is excluded from your love. And your truth transforms the minds of all who seek you ...

So what gets in my way and in your way to keep us from walking up to people whom we would otherwise neglect or despise, and offer ourselves as vehicles for their transformation?

Yes, church friends, 'It sometimes happens that somebody likes somebody.' And to fortify ourselves to be more often the kind of person who doesn't let our likes and dislikes get in the way of our Lord's commission to 'go and make disciples of all nations' and of all manner of people, let us pray together our Collect of the Day to fortify us for that holy calling:

**The Feast of St. Philip: Collect of the Day**

Holy God, no one is excluded from your love and your truth transforms the minds of all who seek you: As your servant Philip was led to embrace the fullness of your salvation and to bring the stranger to Baptism, so give us all the grace to be heralds of the Gospel, proclaiming your love in Jesus Christ our Savior, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

---

© The Cathedral of St. Philip. All rights reserved.