****Jesus’ Love Can Change Death Eaters

This past weekend, we finished up the JK Rowling movie series by watching the last one, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. My movie watching these days is often something light like Beauty and the Beast or something historic like Hidden Figures. But in order to learn the end of the story, I decided to watch the last of the Harry Potter movies.

We weren’t long into the movie before we were introduced to the Death eaters, who are people who move about like mysterious swooshing trails of black that fly in and through and around people and places, often bringing destruction. They come with little warning and are full of darkness and danger. Their purpose is to kill and destroy that which opposes their agenda.

Of course, Harry Potter and his band of friends are not on the side of the Death eaters or Voldemort but keeping their perspective is hard when the Death eaters try and often succeed in killing family, friends and others caught in the cross fire. And isn’t that true in all aspects of our lives? We get hurt or injured or our family member or friend does and slowly we become the enemy to whoever did the hurting. We get angry and we will fight for their memory or for justice. I am all for memories and justice but no matter what side of an issue we fall on, once our anger becomes hatred or disgust and respect is lost, does it matter which side we were on anymore?

I’m afraid in our country where free speech is revered, we have forgotten to revere something equally as important, respect and equal rights. We may have the right to hatred but when our hatred leads to disrespect and violence – no matter which side of the civil rights or political debate we might happen to be on- we are no longer maintaining everyone’s equal rights. The violence from hatred –no matter who expresses it – demonstrator or counter demonstrator –it’s still violence and causes others to lose their right to be unharmed. When violence enters the debate – whether through words or actions towards others, I begin to wonder how the two sides are different from each other. Is violence by the side that is ‘good’ any different than violence by the side that is ‘bad’?

Jesus offered an interesting series of statements about happiness or blessedness. Here is the list: blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are those who mourn, blessed are the meek, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, blessed are the merciful, blessed are the pure in heart, blessed are the peacemakers and blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake (Matt. 5: 1-11). And then he gave this really great suggestion that sounds much more like a command ‘Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, (Matt. 5:44 NRS).

If we call ourselves by Jesus’ name, i.e. Christians, we will have enemies, those who persecute us because we choose to live the way he lived. If we choose to live in him and like him, we are called to put our hatred, our violence, our name calling, our secret prejudice, our pride and power aside. We choose to let it die on the cross with Jesus and rise out of that death with him to enter the life of blessedness. It isn’t easy. It makes our demonstrations much less violent and more about caring for others in love and prayer- even for my enemies and your enemies.

Here’s the bad news. As I read Jesus, if we choose the way of hatred, violence, including yelling and screaming at those we oppose; we are becoming Death eaters too, no matter which side of the political fence we claim. We are no longer seeking, sounding or being righteous because we have become a part of the hurting darkness.

Yes, free speech is our right but before we ever say a word – may we make ourselves aware of our heart and what hides there. We must contemplate who calls us and if it’s Jesus, what he calls us to be and do in his name. Maybe we are called to silently sit or stand in protest of all the Death eating violence and hate around us. Maybe we are called to hug others who are hurting as they carry so much hurt or hatred in themselves. Maybe we are called to break the chain of violence and power in ourselves by praying for peace and love for those who are so angry, whichever side they are on.

But none of this can be done in a state of *self-*righteousness. We can’t claim what we don’t have. For as Christians our only righteousness comes from Jesus’ death which gives us life and the resurrection which we receive as a gift. It is imperative that we must start in a place of humility, meekness, mercy and peace… the place of blessedness- and walk with our hearts and minds first dedicated to someone even greater than our politics – our Lord and Savior Jesus. And he is love and that is how others will know we are his and how we can extinguish any Death eating tendencies we all carry in ourselves. Love roots out Death eating and brings in blessedness every time.