

Do You Want to Be Right? Or Do You Want to Be Effective?

Luke 10: 1-11, 16-20

Comedian Jeff Allen, who does his act both in Las Vegas comedy clubs and for Christian groups, is probably best known for his stories about marriage. Speaking as though he is giving advice about what he has learned about a good marriage, he tells hilarious tales about his relationship with his wife — such as what it was like when they joined a gym together, and how it has been growing older together.

In one of these stories, Allen explains how his dad first taught him about marriage. On Allen's wedding day, his father offered words of wisdom that Allen says he didn't appreciate at the time, but now knows are very true: "Son, I only have one piece of marital advice for you," his dad began. "Before you argue with your new wife ... I want you to stop and ask yourself two questions: Do you want to be right? Or do you want to be happy?"

Allen then, as comedians are wont to do, takes this advice to extremes, saying that he hasn't been right in years, but he is "a happy, happy man." While that is not a healthy way to live, there is a germ of truth in his dad's advice. Imagine how different our disagreements with our spouses, children, coworkers and other people would be if we set aside our desire to be right for the sake of the relationship.

That would seriously change politics. Our leaders might learn to listen to one another, and talk radio hosts would sound a lot less angry. Our Facebook timelines and Twitter feeds that are filled with people spewing opinions about every controversial topic would become more bearable.

Our interactions at work might change from competitions to see who gets the credit to partnerships where we work together for the greater good of our company.

And, well, Christianity's reputation would improve greatly. In the book *un-Christian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity ...and Why It Matters*, David Kinnamen and the Barna Group report on surveys they did with young, unchurched people. The data showed that people often thought of Christians as judgmental, which is another way of saying people think they are always right.

This has become such an issue that some congregations choose not to use their church names when doing mission work — feeding the hungry, housing the poor, etc. They find that when they attempt to reach out in love and service to the world as the church, some recipients and observers are skeptical, wondering what the ulterior motive of the church might be. Some who need help choose to stay away for fear of the judgment they assume they will receive.

You and I may not agree with this assessment, but the evidence says this is how some people outside of the church — those who do not know us well — perceive us. We are viewed as people who want to change the world to fit **our ideal** of what is right. Maybe it is time we heed a slightly altered version of Jeff Allen's advice for marital spats. As the body of Christ called to serve and share the Gospel with the whole world, we should ask ourselves two questions: Do you want to be right? Or do you want to be effective?

In today's gospel lesson, Jesus sends 70 disciples into the cities where he is planning to travel. Their task is to offer peace, heal the sick and tell others about the kingdom of God. Jesus sends them with words we the church need to hear anew today, as he sends us with a similar mission.

Jesus' speech, though, isn't exactly a Knute Rockne pre-game oration that a coach gives to spur his team on to victory. Frankly, it's a bit of a downer. Jesus informs his team that they will be outnumbered. They are not going to be conquering heroes, but lambs among wolves. He doesn't tell them to rely on their training and extensive preparation but instead to head out without taking anything with them. It might have appeared to the disciples that Jesus was setting them up to fail.

Throughout his remarks, Jesus reminds the disciples that their mission is not about *them*. They are to focus completely on the other person's relationship to the Father. Carrying no bag, sandals or other provisions, they will need to rely on the hospitality of others.

Jesus sends them to these neighboring towns, not as experts, leaders, celebrities or know-it-alls. Instead, they must enter every village as guests. They must wait to be invited into the homes and lives of the people they are to serve and with whom they are to share Jesus' message of the kingdom of God.

We might say that Jesus asks them, "Do you want to be right? Or do you want to be effective?"

One of Jesus' instructions has to do with meals. He tells his disciples to eat whatever food their hosts serve. This is the same advice we give our children before we go to dinner at a friend's home. If you are the parent of a picky eater, you have probably advised your child how to handle unfamiliar food. Usually, our advice is similar to Jesus' instructions to his disciples: "Eat whatever is put before you," or at least, "Try it."

When Jesus says this, though, it is about more than taste and etiquette. Remember, Jesus and the disciples were faithful Jews, and the Jewish Law is filled with instructions about food, specifically how to eat kosher. Following these dietary restrictions served as daily reminders to the Hebrew people that they had a higher calling as God's chosen people. The foods they prepared and ate were an important part of their faith and culture, and they had been taught never to compromise.

However, when Jesus says, “Eat what is put before you,” he is asking the disciples to consider the feelings of others and offer them love and grace. “Would you rather be right? Or would you rather be effective?”

Jesus also gives the disciples instructions about how to handle rejection. While he tells the disciples how bad it will be for people and cities who, when rejecting them, are in essence rejecting *him*, he does not tell them to share that information with those cities. Instead, Jesus tells the disciples to brush it off and repeat the message of hope: “God’s kingdom has come to you.” Jesus doesn’t advise his followers to argue with those who reject them. Instead, he tells them to continue preaching about God’s kingdom.

Many Christians today feel that sting of rejection. Jesus’ advice to us is the same. We don’t need to prove anything to others. Instead, we should continue to proclaim God’s kingdom through what we say and how we live. This calls to mind a quote attributed to Ralph Waldo Emerson: “Do not waste yourself in rejection; do not bark against the bad, but chant the beauty of the good.”

Jesus is calling us to do just that. When facing rejection, we need not waste our energy barking against the bad. Our call instead is to chant the beauty of the good of the kingdom of God.

So, we need to ask ourselves: Do you want to be right? Or do you want to be effective? Jesus' answer to those questions is that we should give up our need to always be right and replace it with the intention to always show love.

Amazingly, this counterintuitive method of evangelism is extremely effective. When the disciples return to Jesus after their journey, they excitedly report the overwhelming success of their mission. Outnumbered, underprepared and without the things they thought they would need, they were effective because they were willing to surrender their need to be right for the sake of the other. Love triumphs ego.

We shouldn't be surprised. This is part of the message of salvation Jesus showed us, and it's the reason we call ourselves his followers today. In an act of pure love, Jesus went to the cross. He was right, but silent. He had the power, but chose to surrender. He could have fought and won, but chose instead to love.

Jesus comes with no bag, no staff, no sandals and asks if he can live in and through us. He then asks us as his followers to do much the same — to live in such a way that we will be invited into the lives of others, to share the good news of the kingdom of God with them. Do you want to be right? Or do you want to be effective? Given that choice, love opts for effectiveness.