

Once upon a time, two brothers who lived on adjoining farms fell into conflict. It was the first serious rift in 40 years of farming side by side, sharing machinery, and trading labor and goods as needed without a hitch.

Then the long collaboration fell apart. It began with a small misunderstanding and it grew into a major difference, and finally, it exploded into an exchange of bitter words followed by weeks of silence.

One morning there was a knock on John's door. He opened it to find a man with a carpenter's toolbox. "I'm looking for a few day's work," he said.

"Perhaps you would have a few small jobs here and there. Could I help you?"

"Yes," said the older brother. "I do have a job for you. Look across the creek at that farm. That's my neighbor, in fact, it's my younger brother. Last week there was a meadow between us and he took his bulldozer to the river levee and now there is a creek between us. Well, he may have done this to spite me, but I'll go him one better. See that pile of lumber curing by

the barn? I want you to build me a fence – an 8-foot fence – so I won't need to see his place anymore. Cool him down, anyhow.”

The carpenter said, “I think I understand the situation. Show me the nails and the post-hole digger and I'll be able to do a job that pleases you.”

The older brother had to go to town for supplies, so he helped the carpenter get the materials ready and then he was off for the day.

The carpenter worked hard all that day measuring, sawing, nailing.

About sunset when the farmer returned, the carpenter had just finished his job. The farmer's eyes opened wide, his jaw dropped.

There was no fence there at all. It was a bridge... a bridge stretching from one side of the creek to the other. A fine piece of work handrails and all – and the neighbor, his younger brother, was coming across, his hand outstretched.

“You are quite a fellow to build this bridge, after all, I've said and done.”

The two brothers stood at each end of the bridge, and then they met in the middle, taking each other's hand. They turned to see the carpenter hoist his toolbox on his shoulder. "No, wait! Stay a few days. I have a lot of other projects for you," said the older brother.

"I'd love to stay on," the carpenter said, "but, I have many more bridges to build."

The author of that story is unknown, but it gets to an important point: namely that as humans, we can often get tripped up on our divisions - thanks to the Devil trying to divide us more and more. But, when we get past them, and realize just how much God loves all of us the same, giving us each different tools so we can do the job to work together and build bridges and join the carpenter in his work.

Consider for instance how love changed the following people in real life:

A few days after Rabbi Michael Weisser moved to Lincoln, Nebraska, he got a phone call. The voice on the other end called him a "Jew Boy."

Weisser would be sorry, he said, that he had ever moved to his town. Two days later, a package of anti-Semitic pamphlets showed up on his door with a card that read, “The KKK is watching you, scum.”

Weisser soon realized he was being antagonized by Larry Trapp, the Grand Dragon of the KKK in Nebraska. Trapp, he found out, was a blind man who had lost both legs to diabetes. Instead of being angry, though, Weisser decided to reach out to him.

He started calling Trapp once a week and leaving messages offering to help him out. Eventually, Trapp picked up, and Weisser greeted him by saying, “I heard you’re disabled. I thought you might need a ride to the grocery.”

Trapp hung up, but he called back a few days later, shaken. He told Weisser, “I want to get out of what I’m doing and I don’t know how.”

Weisser visited Trapp and befriended him, and after a while even invited Trapp to move into his home. There, Weisser and his wife took care of the blind and disabled man. It worked. Trapp did not just quit the KKK—he ended up converting to Judaism.

\*\*\*

When Martin Luther King Jr. died, people were angry. Across America, people started to riot. They smashed windows, threw Molotov cocktails, and even battled the firefighters who tried to put the flames out. And in Washington, D.C, the man in charge of calming them down was Walter Washington: the man who, shortly after, would become the city's first black mayor.

Washington was as angry as anybody else, but he didn't think rioting would fix anything. "What's new about it? Martin being shot?" Washington later questioned. A black man getting killed, he said, "isn't new." And burning down a city would not bring him back to life.

So, he walked down the streets of D.C., trying to calm people down. Instead of just ordering them to stop, he asked them to help the people whose homes had been destroyed. Of everyone he asked, Washington claims, only one person said no.

He was not able to completely stop the riot, but he calmed it down. One witness would later say, “Mayor Washington probably saved hundreds of lives.”

\*\*\*

Laurence Jones was nearly killed by a mob in 1918. Rumors had been going around that the black Americans in Mississippi were planning a rebellion, and when a white crowd heard Jones tell his congregation to “fight to survive and succeed,” they figured he must be the one behind it. He would have to die.

The mob dragged Jones out of the pines, where they put a rope around his neck and kindling under his feet. Then they gave him a chance to say his last words before he was hung and burned alive.

Jones told them about the school he had opened to educate black children who did not have the same chances as everyone else. He listed off the white men who had helped him get it off the ground, trying to call for unity. He must have been incredibly eloquent because it actually worked.

An old Civil War veteran recognized the names and realized Jones was telling the truth. "We have made a mistake," the old white man told the mob. "We ought to help him instead of hang him."

The mob pulled him down and even passed around a hat. They raised \$52.40 for his school. Jones did not hold any grudges over it. "I have no time to quarrel," he said, "and no man can force me to stoop low enough to hate him."

\*\*\*

The people in the Pakistani village of Khaksabad got worried when they heard about violence in the nearby town of Gojra. A Muslim mob had attacked a Christian community, and it had torn the whole town into a mess of violence and hatred. They did not want that happening in their town.

When their local Christian church was swept away in a monsoon, they got the chance to do something about it. The Muslims of the town started a

fundraiser to help the Christians out, partly just out of sympathy and partly as a way to bring two split sides of the community together.

Muslims helped out eagerly, donating every penny they could, and they raised enough to build a brand new church for their Christian neighbors.

“A church is also a house of Allah,” one Muslim shopkeeper said about it.

“We worship the same God.”

Dorothy Day, the founder of the Catholic Worker Movement, would often quote Dostoevski's *Brothers Karamazov* which has the line “Love in action is a harsh and dreadful thing compared with love in dreams. Love in dreams thirsts for immediate action, quickly performed, and with everyone watching...whereas active love is labor and perseverance and for some people, perhaps, a whole science.” The point is love in real life is hard work. The Christian is called to choose love in action over love in abstraction. Love is not just a bumper sticker on your car. Love needs to be a way of life, for it makes us better people, and working together there is so much good we can do. But it's worth thinking about the different kinds of ways love is lived out, both as individuals and as a team.

Our first reading from Exodus tells us the story of a battle between Israel and Amalek. Israel prevails, but it's not easy - it requires perseverance as Jesus speaks of in our Gospel. But note also it's a team effort for this to happen.

On the battlefield itself are the soldiers who are directly engaged in the battle, led by Joshua. Think of Mayor Washington and Lawrence Jones standing up to the mobs. We are directly engaged in battle too; the kind in those examples against violence and evil. But also there is the daily spiritual battle where we fight the demons of temptation in our lives. There too is the battle of speaking up, like Rabbi Weisser did responding to hate with love, which we do when we say "this isn't right" or we speak about what we believe.

We are also told of Moses in the story too; he sits atop the mountain, something generals would typically do on the battlefield, directing from a position where they can see what is going on. As Catholics, the pope and bishops and priests help guide us in our battles too; in part it's why my hands are often raised as I pray at Mass like Moses were in the battle. Of

course God is the ultimate General. And the point is we need good generals in our life too to help us get the orders; sometimes we play that role too for one another. It's why we listen to the Church in faith and morals, and give advice and counsel in a loving way to one another. Let us heed the words of Saint Paul in his 2nd letter to Timothy remain faithful to what you have learned and believed. We can learn so much good stuff that will help get us to heaven; but the problem is a lack of catechesis or not wanting to read the instruction manuals on how to get to heaven. Paul is right - Scripture - and to it I'd add Tradition - is there to teach, to refute, to correct, to train. Faith formation doesn't end with Confirmation, but is ongoing - so lets study the game plans God gives us throughout our lives.

Note though what happens when Moses' hands are lowered - the Amalekites get the better of the fight. Such is the fight against evil. How easy it would be for the people in the stories to just give up; why bother they are Christian; why bother people will always hate one another; why bother I can't overcome this struggle so why fight it? Well, the battle is ongoing. Christian and Jewish thinkers saw Amalek, which was the first enemy to fight against Israel after they escaped Egypt, to symbolize every enemy of God's people; every danger, force or idea. So how do we keep

our hands up? We trust that Jesus goes with us into battle to fight our enemies. Interestingly, as pointed out by the Dominican Priest Nicholas Crowe, the English names 'Joshua' and 'Jesus' are in fact different versions of the same name in Hebrew: 'Yeshua' was a common alternative to 'Yehoshua'. Indeed, the ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew bible which was very familiar to so many of the first Christians even translates Joshua's name as 'Iesous' – 'Jesus'. The first Greek speaking Christians would therefore have read this text and seen that a man called Jesus led Israel into battle against Amalek; a man called Jesus overcame this first enemy of Israel that was a symbol of all that is evil; and a man called Jesus symbolically anticipated the victory of Jesus Christ over sin and death on the cross. Jesus (Joshua) son of Nun conquered Amalek, the symbol of all that is evil in a battle in the desert. Jesus, Son of Mary, Son of God conquered the reality of evil through his death, resurrection and ascension. Jesus Christ conquered not just 'Amalek', a symbol of evil, but sin and death itself. This is what Jesus does for us, so let us run to Him. We pray every day. We don't grow lax and start skipping Mass. We examine our consciences and ask for God's mercy and love. We go to confession. We receive Holy Communion. Jesus gives us victory, but we are still struggling

against evil, and prayer and closeness to God is our fight in this battle. We are never on our own - Jesus is there to help us hold our hands up.

But lastly, together, we build the bridges and work together. Together, we make a difference. How are hearts and minds changed on abortion, on racism, on hatred? When people pray together like they did at the march for life with 3,000 at the cathedral, or people of all races and cultures marching together during the Civil Rights movement. When people donate to a charity or to the Church to help her provide for the needs of others. When we volunteer of our time. Each of us in our own way can make such a difference - for just as thousands were involved in the battle against the Amalekites, the same is true in our ongoing battle against evil.

Where we see the work of Old Scratch is where there is intense division. And I'm not talking about the kind of division that is necessary and even good; where we have legitimate differences of opinion on politics, or roles played in the Church, or the differences that make us unique. Rather, it's the kind of differences that lead to hate; that lead a man to hate a man for being a Jew, or a Black Man, or a Muslim. We see it all the time in our world, and sadly even in our Church universal and local; people at odds in

a parish, not liking someone for being too liberal or conservative, the new members vs. the people who have been there for several generations; loving Pope Francis but bashing Pope Benedict XVI or vice versa; thinking there's only one way to do things. That's not how God works though. Rather, that's how the Devil works.

Though the carpenter managed to build that bridge in a day, and the battle was won by the end of the day, as we all know the battle is ongoing. Sometimes it wears us out - but we are never fighting alone, for God is with us as are so many great people. As Paul tells us "be persistent whether it is convenient or inconvenient," for when we do, we can work with Jesus to find the way to the Heavenly Kingdom and help one another to do the same. In the Eucharist, we encounter God's love in action, given to us time and time again out of love from the God who never stops loving and feeding us for the battle. May that love transform us as we transform the world.