

Brennan Manning, author of the Ragamuffin Gospel has a slogan to introduce himself to others. “I am the one Jesus loves.” This is a phrase that John, one of Jesus’s disciples used to refer to himself.

Manning says, “If John were to be asked, ‘What is your primary identity in life?’ he would not reply, ‘I am a disciple, an apostle, an evangelist, an author of one of the four Gospels,’ but rather, ‘I am the one Jesus loves.’”ⁱ

Think about that now for a moment. What if we began to first think of ourselves as “I am the one Jesus loves” and then began introducing ourselves to people that way. So, rather than, I am a priest at St Andrews and St Johns or teacher at this school or I am a nurse at this hospital or I am the mother of or father of or spouse of, we begin to identify as “I am the one Jesus loves.”

If we are the one Jesus loves what does that mean? How does identifying ourselves as the one Jesus loves change how we live?

I suggest that once we realize that our identity comes from being a loved friend of Jesus, then we begin to live into that identity. We live the life we were created to live – in loving, caring community with one another.

Once we realize that we are the one Jesus loves we realize that others are, too. All people can say that they are the one Jesus loves. When all of us begin to identify

as being ones loved by Jesus the whole community changes. We are all related. We are all united. We are all loved by the special Diety who created us, died for us, provides for us. God's intent for the world was that all of the beloved of God would live in harmony with one another.

We are people loved by Jesus and we are called to serve others loved by Jesus. This calling means we do things – small and large – to show hospitality to others. We are called to do what we can to create loving community for and with others.

One example of creating loving community is, of course, wearing a mask. “I wear a mask to protect you; you wear a mask to protect me.” Another example is shopping for those who are vulnerable if we are not. Or providing transportation help or extra food or a few kind words.

We have an opportunity to create loving community through an event St Andrews is doing with the two Methodist churches in Newfane. We will hold a prayer vigil entitled Love Rising, from dawn to dusk on July 15. We can sign up to pray for an hour from our home, the park, the lake, or any location we choose. We are praying for peace. We are praying that all of us who Jesus loves will learn to live in beloved community. When we register to pray, we receive a Love Rising sign to put in our yards

alongside any other signs we have – Bernie Sanders, Donald Trump, Black Lives Matter, or Blue Lives Matter. Jesus loves us, and Jesus loves all these other people are too.

Remember that lovely song Evan and Melissa sang last week – the one about how we can build a beautiful city.

We may not reach the ending

But we can start

Slowly but truly mending

Brick by brick

Heart by heart

Now, maybe now

We start learning how

We can build a beautiful city

Yes we can, yes, we can

We can build a beautiful city

Not a city of angels

But we can build a city of menⁱⁱ

We are the ones Jesus loves, and we take our identity from him. That identity is who we were created to be. It supersedes our identity with our occupation, our parenthood, and our spousehood. We bring Jesus along with us and in us. We do whatever we can to build a beautiful city.

ⁱ Brennan Manning, found in Synthesis, Year A, 2017

ⁱⁱ Stephen Schwartz in Godspell, copyright New Cadenza Music Group