

# What's The Difference?

Matthew 7:21-28

10<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

14 August 2011

London, England, is a city I have loved since childhood. It's the city where as a boy I visited aunts and uncles. It's the city that is home to my sister and her family. I love the underground, or "The Tube" as it is called. I love the red buses. I love St. Paul's and Westminster Abbey. I love the Thames with its barges and boats. I love the museums and art galleries, the palaces and the parks, the stately and modernistic buildings, the football stadiums and historic cricket grounds. I love London's many and varied communities from poor to rich, from Tottenham to Chelsea, from Stratford to Southwark. I love its people, friendly and generous, drawn from every country in the world, from every known ethnic and religious background. It's a city in which there is so much to do and see and enjoy. Truly Samuel Johnson was right in saying, "When a man is tired of London he is tired of life."<sup>1</sup>

It was particularly painful, therefore, to see this wonderful city tarnished by the rioting and looting that took place this past week in the wake of the police shooting of a suspected drug dealer. The scenes of mayhem and arson were horrific with mobs roaming the street, plundering and assaulting without qualm or conscience.

Of course, the media along with politicians and community leaders were not slow to apportion blame. The police were not robust enough in dealing with the violence, some said. Others thought that it was a result of the austerity measures brought in by the Conservative Government. Yet others faulted the social media, Twitter, Facebook and Blackberry Messenger, for giving young people new ways to organise and plan their criminal misbehaviour. Some maintained that it was all caused by, the scum of society, an angry underprivileged, neglected and unemployed underclass with no education or job skills. But, that argument fell apart when it was discovered in court that among the accused were a recent sociology graduate, a trainee lawyer, an aspiring ballerina, an Olympic ambassador and many other young people from rich and prosperous backgrounds. Then there were those that pointed the finger at the bad example set by the British politicians who fiddled their expenses and investment bankers raking in huge bonuses while bankrupting the country. And so it went on.

My own theory, tongue-in-cheek though it may be, is that it was all Canada's fault. The British rioters remembered the G8 riots in Toronto and the Vancouver riots in the wake of the Canucks' Stanley cup loss and said to themselves, "Anything you can do, we can do

better." Just joking, of course! Or, am I? Maybe there is a global link that needs to be explored.

Amidst the violent chaos and confusion of the disturbances which spread to other cities in England, there was one man who stood out as a shining example of hope and reconciliation. A man who managed to calm some very volatile circumstances that threatened to turn into a race riot. His name was Tariq Jahan, the father of one of the three young Muslim men killed by an Afro-Caribbean car driver as they protected local businesses in Birmingham. Just a few hours after trying in vain to revive his dying son, Tariq made a remarkable appeal for peace. "I don't want there to be any more trouble, anyone getting hurt," he said "My son died defending the community he lived in. Blacks, Asians, whites – we all live in the same community. Step forward if you want to lose your sons. Otherwise, calm down and go home, please."<sup>2</sup>

A local Anglican bishop who attended a community meeting about the killings at Mr. Jahan's mosque said afterwards, "I felt things were a bit on a knife's edge. There were many people in this meeting, speaking up in terms of not rising, standing above. There were also voices, angrily encouraging some kind of retaliation. [But] the one thing that tipped it [was] the father of the youngest man to be killed saying it wouldn't do his son's memory any good at all if more violence were to be perpetrated there."<sup>3</sup>

I am always very much in awe of that one person who, in extreme situations, has the courage to stand up and make a difference. That person who is not afraid to swim against the tide of prevailing opinion. That person who is prepared to challenge the crowd mentality, to speak words of uncomfortable truth, to draw on the values of a higher morality and the precepts of deeply ingrained spirituality. Whether the name of that person who is willing to make a difference in life is named William Wilberforce or Martin Luther King or Nelson Mandela or Tariq Jahan, they are to be held in awe and greatly admired, and held up as examples for everyone to emulate.

However, I also believe that we don't need to be caught up in extreme circumstances, or to be a famous leader or to be a person in the news in order to make a difference in this world. I believe we can each be a powerful presence for change wherever we live, whatever our circumstances and whatever our gifts. And this is especially true of those who bear the name Christian for we of all people are called to make a difference. Not any old kind of difference, but a very

significant difference, a unique difference – a different kind of difference.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus lays out very explicitly how his followers are to make a radical difference: Be the salt of the earth, he says. Be the light of the world. Do not take pay back evil for evil. Turn the other cheek. Go the second mile. Love your enemies. Pray for those that hate you. Do not seek treasure on earth. Seek first the kingdom of God.<sup>4</sup>

But then, as Jesus concludes his Sermon on the Mount, his great Christian Magna Carta, he adds the real kicker. Don't just listen to what I say, he commands. Don't just think what fine words they are. Don't just admire this great ethical code of conduct. No, to make a difference in the world, you actually have to go out and do what I tell you. If you don't then it's just like building a house on the sand. Everything you do will be done in vain.<sup>5</sup>

Former American president, Jimmy Carter, did his best work of his life after he left the White House with his involvement in *Habitat For Humanity*. But he didn't start out by talking about *Habitat* on a highly-paid promotional tour. No, he, along with Rosalynn, bought a hammer and started hitting nails to help build houses for people in need. And it was only a long time after President Carter began his practical engagement in *Habitat* that he actually started talking about it. By then, people sat up and took notice. They listened because the words on his lips were backed up by the calluses on his hands. He made a difference in the world because he simply translated into action what his faith dictated he should do.<sup>6</sup>

Unlike Jimmy Carter, we Christians these days are great talkers, aren't we? We talk up a storm about what we are going to do for Jesus Christ. We talk a mile-a-minute about our vision for his church. We are never at a loss for words to complain about what has gone wrong in the past. And we never cease to paint endless word-pictures of our ideals for service in the future. But until we put our hands where our mouths are, we are never going to make a difference. We are never going to make the radical kind of difference that Christ calls us to make in our lives and in our church.

Of course, maybe, as we were saying earlier, we think that we are not qualified enough, not skilled enough, not important enough, not famous enough to make a difference in today's world and in other people's lives. After all, isn't it only the movers-and-shakers, the rich and the famous, who can really cause things to happen?

If you think that, then take this quiz:

1. Name the world's 5 wealthiest people.
2. Name the last 5 people who won a Nobel prize in literature
3. Name the last 5 winners of the Miss Universe

contest

4. Name the last 5 Academy Award winners for best actor and actress
5. Name the last 5 winners of the World Series

Now, here's another quiz:

1. Name 5 people who have had a good influence on your life.
2. Name 5 teachers who helped you on your journey through school.
3. Name 5 friends who have been there for you in difficult times.
4. Name 5 people who have taught you something worthwhile.
5. Name 5 people who have made you feel appreciated and special.<sup>7</sup>

I am willing to bet that, though you were only able to name a few people in the first quiz, you were probably able to name nearly everyone in the second one. Which just goes to show that the people who made the most significant difference in your life were not the ones with the greatest credentials or the most power but the ordinary, everyday people around you who cared for you.

If this is true, then it means, conversely, that you, an ordinary person, have the greatest power to make a real difference in the lives of those around you. And, if you seek to make this difference by living out the teachings of Jesus and by relying on the power of the Holy Spirit, then the influence you can exert – or, rather, God can exert through you – will be simply phenomenal.

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel Johnson, "Why, Sir, you find no man, at all intellectual, who is willing to leave London. No, Sir, when a man is tired of London, he is tired of life; for there is in London all that life can afford."

<http://www.samueljohnson.com/tiredlon.html>

<sup>2</sup> Sandy MacAskill, "Father of Man Killed in Unrest Helps Calm Tensions", The New York Times, 12<sup>th</sup> August 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/12/world/europe/12birmingham.html>

<sup>3</sup> CBC News "U.K. riot victim's father calls for calm", 11 August 2011, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/story/2011/08/11/riots-men-killed-reverend.html>

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 5-7

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 7:24-27

<sup>6</sup> King Duncan, "Rock Solid Living", [www.christianglobe.com](http://www.christianglobe.com), 25 May 2005

<sup>7</sup> Roy S. Stauffer, "Making A Difference", Lindenwood Christian Church, <http://cam.lindenwood.net>