There was once a truck driver who pulled his truck in at a roadside diner and he went in to have a bite to eat. And then along came three bikers. They were very aggressive and fierce, and they decided they were going to give the trucker a bad time. So, one of them poured salt and pepper on his head; another one threw his pie on the floor; another one knocked over his coffee and spilled it in his lap. The truck driver maintains his dignity. He said nothing. He just got up very quietly, paid his bill, and went out into the night. But after a while one of the bikers went up to the barman and he said, “That guy wasn’t much of a man, was he?” And the barman looked out the window and he said, “No, and he’s not much of driver either. He just drove his truck over three bikes.”

This story is pretty much the opposite of the story we just heard in the 1st reading, the story of David and Saul. Now, some of you may know the background to this story but for those who don’t, it goes like this. Saul was Israel’s first king, after the Israelites had made it to the Promised Land from Egypt, just before the year 1,000 BC. But not long after he became king Saul disobeyed God, and because of that God chose David to take over.

So, David – you may remember, was a shepherd, the youngest of his brothers - managed to defeat the greatest of the Philistine warriors, Goliath, and because of that, David’s fame grew. Actually, as the Israelite troops were returning from battle, the citizens sang a song for them: “Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands,” which really angered Saul, and from that point on he was incredibly jealous and suspicious of David, and sought to kill him. Which is where we find ourselves in the first reading from today: David evading Saul. And so, in an attempt to prove his loyalty, he sneaks into the soldiers’ camp and steals Saul’s spear and water jug, and then says, “though the LORD delivered you into my grasp, I would not harm the LORD’s anointed.” As if to say, “I could have easily ended this rivalry by killing you, but I didn’t.”

Which is pretty amazing isn’t it? because David’s culture did not teach mercy to enemies. Even the Jewish Law itself said, an eye for an eye. But David was ahead of his time. He recognized that even though Saul had messed up, he was still the King - the Lord’s anointed - and that even though he was trying to Kill David, Saul was still part of God’s plan. In a word, David loved Saul, which, as we have said before, isn’t that warm fuzzy feeling we sometimes get when we’re around people we like. David’s love for Saul meant he wanted what was good for Saul, which meant that he refused to take revenge. Instead, David forgave Saul, and what happened was Saul ended up repenting.

What’s so fascinating about this story is that it is the polar opposite to something David would do later on in his life. One day, after Saul had died in battle and David had become king, David caught sight of Bathsheba, the wife of his general, Uriah. And in his lust for her, he had Uriah sent to the front lines of battle where he was killed. And so, we ask, what happened to David? Maybe it was the newfound power he had attained, we don’t know, but something blinded him. He had forgotten how to love, to desire what was best for the other. He was looking solely after himself, and as a result, someone ended up dying.

Now, the tendency we have when we read Scripture is to read it as pure history, as if the stories are biographies that are detached from our lives. And so we say, “that David was a real jerk,” and we leave it there. But the point of Scripture is not to
simply record history, but to interpret it, precisely so that we can shine the light of these events on our own lives and ask ourselves, “am I more like David than I think I am?” I think if we really ask ourselves that question honestly, the answer is the same for all of us. On the one hand, we’ve all experienced moments in our lives where we have shown great love as David did to Saul. We’re on fire with love. Spouses know this – we just had Valentine’s Day a couple weeks ago. Parents know this. Even after that 4 am call to the hospital I felt pretty good.

But on the other hand, there are moments when we have really failed to love, also like David. The other day I was flipping through TV and the movie Grease was on, with John Travolta and Olivia Newton John. And it was during the scene near the beginning of the movie where Danny and Sandy encounter each other at the high school’s football rally. And Danny is initially so thrilled to see his summer love, but with his friends with him, he insults Sandy to protect his own image.

I thought, what a good image for that battle that wages in us between authentic love for the other and self-love. And we all know the feeling, because we all chose self-love, whether it’s ignoring the person who sleeps outside our church, gossiping about someone else, or losing our tempers. Sometimes, though, we’re not at fault, sometimes we’re truly the victim of someone else’s selfishness; but then what do we do – an eye for an eye, we think – and in our hearts we kill that other person.

But Jesus calls us to rise above that, doesn’t he? In today’s Gospel He tells us that there is another way, a better way: “love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.” What?! How can Jesus say this, doesn’t he know what I’ve been through? Well he can, because he’s God. But he didn’t just say it, he lived it himself, because he wanted us to know just how powerful that love is. And there is no clearer representation of it than on the cross, where Jesus says, “father, forgive them,” and we see that in doing so, one of Jesus’ enemies, a Roman soldier, is transformed: “this truly was the Son of God,” he says.

And at the resurrection, Jesus appears to the apostles who had abandoned him and says, peace be with you. Notice…not a rebuke, not an eye for an eye like the truck driver, but love, because they had been broken by what they had done, and Jesus knew that his love, and his love alone, would heal them. That’s what we mean when we say that the meaning of life is to know the truth, and to be in love.

John Paul II said something similar to this in an encyclical in 1979, *Redemptory Hominis*, which means “The Redeemer of Man”: “Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it.”

Two years later, in 1981, JPII would be shot, and in 1983, he would visit the man who shot him in prison to forgive him. JPII bore witness to the truth behind his words. His love restored a man to life who had fallen into spiritual death.

I came across that quote after the Las Vegas shooting in 2017. How many people do we know whose lives have gone astray, whose lives are seemingly senseless? They hurt others, they hurt themselves, and because of that, it becomes so easy to cast them off, to classify them as an enemy. But Jesus asks more from us, and he enables us to do what needs to be done, because when people know that someone loves them and is willing to sacrifice for them, it changes everything – love never fails, St. Paul says.
That's what Jesus did for us, and in the Sacraments, especially Baptism, Confession and the Eucharist, we receive all we will ever need to carry out this seemingly impossible mission of loving even the most unlovable of people. St. John of the Cross, a Carmelite priest from Spain in the 1500s once said, “where there is no love, put love, and there you will draw love out.” He is trustworthy, for he was persecuted by his brother Carmelites. So we ask ourselves, “Where is God calling me to put love?” “Where is He asking me to offer my life to someone in need, in order to give meaning to their life?” Perhaps my enemy, someone I need to forgive. Perhaps, my spouse, or my children. To you fathers out there, it can be as easy as telling your children that you love them, especially your sons. When you do that, the impact that has on them is enormous. There is a story about the Apostle John, the one apostle out of the original 12 that was not martyred. The story goes that he went on to live a long life in Ephesus, and would preach the same thing every Sunday: “little children, love one another.” After a while, his congregation said to him, won’t you teach us something new?” To which he said, “if you have learned this, there is nothing else to teach.” May our worship with one another, and our encounter with our loving God in the Eucharist, help us to learn this love.