

Luke 6: 27-36

**“But I say to you that listen: Love your enemies,
do good to those who hate you,
bless those who curse you,
pray for those who abuse you.**

**If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also,
and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt.
Give to everyone who begs from you;
and if someone takes away your goods,
do not ask for them again.**

Do to others as you would have them do to you.

**If you love those who love you,
what credit is that to you?**

For even sinners love those who love them.

If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you?

For even sinners do the same.

**If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive,
what credit is that to you?**

Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again.

**But love your enemies,
do good and lend, expecting nothing in return.**

**Your reward will be great,
and you will be children of the most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked**

**Be merciful,
just as your Father is merciful.**

Meditation

On August 15, 1947 India received its independence from the British Empire largely due to the nonviolent movement of Mahatma Gandhi....

During the 1960's thousands of Black Americans marched –unarmed- from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama. Although they were brutalized with billy clubs and tear gas, they held to their belief in returning love instead of violence and their march to Montgomery ended with the passage of the Voting Rights Act in the summer of 1965.

In 2003, a 23 year old peace keeper and justice seeker, American volunteer attempted to stop the destruction of a Palestinian home in the refuge camp of Rafa near Gaza strip. Rachel Corrie was standing on a pile of earth wearing an orange fluorescent jacket and using a megaphone shouting to the tank driver to stop. He did not.

He not only rolled over her once...he backed over her for a second time. Intentional? Depends upon who you ask...

**2,000 years ago Jesus of Nazareth told Peter to put away his sword as he was being arrested by Roman Soldiers in the Garden of Gethemane...
...and where did that get him? on the cross...**

Non violent resistance to evil has always had mixed results....

So why would Jesus advocate non-violence throughout his entire life in his preaching and teaching?

Why would he tell Peter to put away his sword likely knowing what would happen if/when he was arrested?

Why would Jesus tell us to turn the other cheek and do good to those who hate us?

Why in the world, would he tell us to love, yes love, our enemies?

Why? Because he knew that violence begets violence and because he knew, he rightly knew, that Love is the only option that is powerful enough interrupt the cycle of hate and vengeance.

Love is the only option that includes everything...all people...all beings...

Love does not discriminate...

Love will not marginalize...

True, authentic Love wants what is in the highest good for each one...

for everyone...bar none.

In our reading today, Jesus talks about turning the other cheek,

and giving your shirt when someone asks for your coat...

Now...it is very important to understand he is not advocating for anyone to be a doormat.

So, please allow me to explain....

let's take the example of when strikes you on the cheek,

you should offer the other also...

this is not recommending that you accept abuse.

In Jesus' time there were clear lines of status and authority...

If one who was in a superior position wanted to strike someone who was an inferior,

he do so like this back handed...

If the two people were of equal status it would be an open handed slap: like this...

Now the left hand was only used for personal hygiene.

**If you used your left hand for anything else,
you would bring shame upon yourself...
and in Jesus' day your whole life revolved around issues of honor and shame...
CAN I ASK FOR A VOLUNTEER?**

**So let's say you are an inferior...and your superior isn't happy with you so he slaps you:
If you were to turn and offer your other cheek, now your superior has a choice.
He could hit you as an equal: open handed...thus leveling the power between you...
or he would humiliate himself and use his left hand...
and thus you would have 'won' the encounter....
without ever using violence yourself!**

**and the advice about giving your shirt if someone wants your coat?
In Jesus' day...if one person was naked the shame
was on the person viewing the naked person...
not the naked person him or herself.
and, be aware... in his day, people didn't wear underwear.
They didn't have multiple items of clothing.
For the poor, most of them used their coats as their sleeping bags and blankets...
So if a someone asked for your coat: they would have been taking your bed and blanket as
well...and if you also gave them your shirt...then you would be standing there naked....
and THEY would be shamed. not you. Once again, a readjustment of the power field.**

**What Jesus is asking us to do is stand up to violence and evil...
to resist the ugliness that humans are capable of
without continuing the cycle of violence and evil.
and we can only do so when we connect with Divine courage, confidence
and self respect.
We can only do so when we acknowledge the humanity of our opponent,
even though it is hidden under layers upon layers of muck...**

He wants us to remember that all of creation, all people are daughters and sons of the Holy...but some of us forget that.

**Some of us are so caught up in the throes of ego
some of us have been so harmed by the evil done unto them,
that they have forgotten who they truly, really essentially are...**

**When we encounter violence and evil with Love,
then their anger and hatred has nothing to latch on to...
it rick-o-shea's off of us and bounces right back to where it came from....
does that mean nothing physically will happen to you?**

**Of course not...we all know what happened to Jesus...
but what it does mean is that even if your body is harmed,**

your heart, your psyche, your soul, remains untouched and unharmed...

**YOU are not a perpetrator of hate and violence and
YOU are not brought into that cycle of hate and violence.**

**That cycle has a little less fuel...
and fires that are not fueled eventually die out.**

**Jesus was 200% correct when he advised us to love our enemies:
it doesn't mean we have to feel the warm fuzzies for them,
but it does mean that we desire for them what is in their highest good...**

and it is very, very important to pray for our enemies...

No one does evil from a happy and contented heart. No one.

**The sure way to end violence is to nurture hearts that are contented...
to find ways that help people to feel valued and respected and yes, even loved....**

Now, I will admit, it is easy on a beautiful Sunday afternoon to talk about prayer and love and nonviolence when I or any of my loved ones are not being threatened.

As much as I think I understand what Jesus is talking about and believe in it... there are situations when force must be used to stop evil.

But if we at least consider his teachings of prayer and love and nonviolence then our use of force will be only what is necessary to stop evil.

It will not be used to humiliate or de-humanize.

We will not use our power or our status to beat down or beat up....

We will use our power to stop the violence even as we respect the humanity of the perpetrator.

That is the power of Love.

The ability to say no without resorting to the desecration of a fellow human being.

Ghandi knew this Power...

Martin Luther King knew this Power

Rachel Corrie knew this Power...

Jesus knew this power...

Now we do too...

**the question is...do we accept the power of Love
or do we continue the cycle of despair and violence?**

Each of us must make our own choice and live with its consequence.

Amen.

