

**I don't think I have to make a list of all the violent situations in the world to convince you that we live in extraordinarily difficult times.**

**And I'm not talking about financial struggles or the world economy but I'm referring to the level of violence and warfare that is going on simultaneously in so many different places all over the world...**

**And I always find myself wondering....  
as I prepare for chapel each week...  
what does our faith, my faith mean in times like these?**

**What does prayer and bible study and worship mean in a world where women are raped, men are beheaded and children live in a constant state of fear...  
all as a strategies of war?**

**I chose this reading on purpose for today.  
Interestingly...in the Common Lectionary: the calendar of readings that mainline protestant denominations use...this reading is only read on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July...  
in the schedule that the Roman Catholic churches use,  
this reading never is read on a Sunday...  
Do you find that as curious as I do?  
Isn't it interesting that this very challenging instruction of Jesus  
is not regularly read when the people gather?**

**My intent for today is not to make a political comment  
or to make suggestions what any government ought to do or not do...  
I am personally very glad that I do not have the responsibility  
of when to send troops into war ...**

**My intent for today is to reflect upon the teaching and wisdom of Jesus  
and how it affects each of us personally ...**

**“But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,  
so that you may be children of your Father in heaven”**

**How in the world is that possible these days? Why in the world would we do it?**

**Why in the world would we pray for those who took the life of Michael Foley, for instance?**

**Was it easier to love your enemies and to pray for those who persecute you  
in Jesus’ day than today...**

**Was Jesus delusional?**

**Was he unrealistic?**

**Was he a pie in the sky idealist with his head buried in the sand  
about the harsh facts of life...**

**Hardly.**

**So...why in the world would he say such things?**

**Well...here is my 2cents worth...**

**It seems to me from the beginning of human existence  
humanity has often times—most of the time...some time...  
resorted to domination as a way of solving a dispute.**

**Whoever had the longer spear,  
the bigger army,  
and/or the more powerful God  
would dominate the weaker tribe or nation  
and then do what they wanted to do....**

As History shows us...at some point in the future,  
the dominated, those who had been defeated... became the dominators...  
Your nation, your people did x, y and z to my nation and my people...  
so therefore now I get to pay you back....  
and so it goes and goes and goes...the cycle continue with no end in sight.  
Memories of past injustices are held up so that the flames  
of righteous indignation can rage with intensity  
so that when payback time comes...  
the people will have the energy and the strength to do so...

Memories of past oppression and past violence  
are often kept alive on purpose.  
Anger, rage, bitterness, resentment and all of those other ugly human emotions  
are kept intentionally simmering in the hearts of the people...  
So that when the time is right, the flames of those feeling can be fanned  
into a blazing fury so that the dominated can become the dominators....  
and then, those who once held the power become powerless  
and then they begin to simmer and wait until their time is due...  
and the cycle goes round and round.

I believe that the reason the words of Jesus are so very wise,  
is because a bigger and better spear, army or missile  
will not quench the flames of rage and resentment in the human heart.

Only the power of Love, will do that.

To pray for one's enemy I believe,  
is to pray for that person's peace of Heart, mind and soul,  
that they might know, deeply know the power of Holy Love.

To pray for our enemies is to that they may know and feel love,  
that they may feel safe,  
that they may be able to see the beauty of the world in which we all live  
To pray for our enemies is to pray that their children may feel safe and loved,  
that they have food on their supper table  
a roof over their heads,  
fresh, clean water to drink.

I believe, when we pray like that,  
it offers the possibility for the hearts of our enemies begin to soften...  
The energy of prayer is powerful and far beyond our understanding..  
So how our prays affect them, I'm trusting Jesus on this one..

But one thing I know for sure, from my personal experience...  
when I pray like that for those people I struggle to understand much less love...  
the raging flames of hatred, anger and bitterness in my heart begin to subside....  
and I can begin to see the humanity of my enemy...  
and I feel more at peace...  
And it can be so for you...

As followers of Jesus, we are called to Love large....  
we talk about it a lot here at the Wayside Chapel!  
That doesn't mean we just love those who love us, we know that...  
Jesus calls us to a radical love that often seems beyond our capabilities  
and maybe it is, if we try to do it on our own.  
But we don't have to do it all by ourselves...

Jesus calls us to let the Love of Holy One love our enemies for us.  
I don't think he expects us to have 'warm fuzzies' for those who persecute us...  
but we are called to desire their peace, their happiness, their contentment...

**because Jesus knew that a heart that feels contented and at peace  
does not strike out with horrific violence...**

**Can you try to imagine just what might happen in the hearts of the people who belong to  
ISIS if we prayed for their safety and the peace?**

**Can you imagine what might happen in our hearts  
if we prayed for the safety and the peace of the people who belong to ISIS?**

**When we pray for another's peace of heart,  
we find that our own peace has grown....**

**Prayer ought not be the last resort...**

**it is not a panacea when you don't know what else to do or to say...**

**Prayer is a powerful, Holy energy and grace that reverberates throughout the cosmos.**

**If we don't pray for the peace of heart for those who intend violence,  
in whatever country they live in, for whatever cause they fight  
what is going to change?**

**The cycles of violence, rage and hatred will only continue.**

**Praying for the peace of heart, mind and soul  
of our enemies and those who persecute us  
is the most powerful and loving action that we can all take  
for the world...**

**Praying for our own peace of heart and mind and soul  
is the most powerful and loving thing we can do for ourselves!**

**Praying for peace of heart, mind and soul for all beings  
is the way of Jesus.**

**It is the way to break the cycle of death and destruction...  
and what could be better than that?**

**amen.**