

Matthew 5: 38-

You have heard it said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’

But I say to you: Do not resist an evildoer.

But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also;

and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well;

and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile.

Give to everyone who begs from you,

and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.”

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 onto 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 whom 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 Gesthamene...
...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 the last time the Jews revolted against the most powerful empire in the world 2,000 Jewish men were crucified and left as an example hanging on crosses throughout Israel.

He did not want that to happen again.

He also 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.

He is inviting us to become creative...to think outside of the

the "normal", habitual, usual way of resolving conflict

so that we don't participate in the continuing cycle of

humiliation, revenge and violence...

Now...as I was preparing for today, I came upon this article in the

Harvard Gazette written by Michell Nicholassen and published on Feb. 4, 2019.

Ms Nicholassen reports on research done by Erica Chenoweth which suggests that

"nonviolent civil resistance is far more successful in creating broad based change than violent campaigns."

According to her research "Countries in which there were nonviolent campaigns were

about 10 times likelier to transition to democracies within a five year period compared to

countries in which there were violent campaigns..." and Dr. Chenoweth continues: "That

even when they fail, civil resistance campaigns often lead to longer-term reforms than

violent campaigns do...."

mmmm...interesting, don't you think?

But what about individual situations of conflict?

Is Jesus' advice for nonviolence even remotely possible or reasonable?

It is one thing to be a part of a huge nonviolent demonstration...

**it is quite another to be confronted as an individual
with a violent aggressor standing right in front of me
threatening me, or someone I love, with harm.**

I'm going to be honest with you here...

Scholars agree that these teachings are authentic teachings of Jesus.

**Because they are mentioned not only in Matthew's Gospel from which we read,
but also in Luke's Gospel...**

I can pray for my enemies without too much of a problem...

**and...maybe (and I stress maybe) I might be able to resist violence
when violence is being done to me...**

**but could I resist using any means to stop harm being done to someone
I love???? I don't know about that.**

**This teaching of Jesus raises a lot of questions in my heart and my mind...
not only questions of could I...should I remain nonviolent in every situation??**

As I pondered and prayed this week,

**I remembered that Jesus was instructing his listeners to use nonviolent
techniques to change the power dynamics of the situation.**

And as I continued to think about this,

**I began to wonder if simply being open to non-violent resistance
might nurture an awareness of who am I and how am I in confrontational situations.**

Perhaps opening up the conversation that there is another way to deal with violence in fact opens up the possibility of that other way.

Perhaps when we ponder the possibility of being in conflict differently we begin to be conflict differently.

Perhaps, even if we do feel the need to use violence we will do so differently, from a different ground or base.

**What I mean is: even as we use violence to stop harm,
perhaps we might use just what is required...
we won't gleefully resort to shock and awe...
we won't dehumanize the other...
we will use just enough.**

Does that make sense?

**I will be honest...this is THE hardest teaching of Jesus,
and perhaps I will not be able to follow it 100% of the time,
but this I do vow:
I vow not to ignore it...**

**Because then, perhaps the more we consider his teachings,
the less automatically we will resort to violence...
the less we will contribute to the cycles of violence
for this time and place, in our lives...
and that is a miracle in and of itself....
and for that we shall say: thank you...Amen.**

