

Matt. 5:38-42

Jesus said: You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not (violently) resist an evil doer. 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.

END WAR

Matthew 5:43-48

"You have heard that it was said, 'you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 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; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Prayer. Holy God, continue to weave us together in love, even love of our enemy. Grace us with insight and grant us courage to join Jesus in his work of breaking our human cycle of violence. Help us to rob the power of oppressors of their power to humiliate; to rob the haves of their power to keep the have-nots down; and to rob the oppressor of his victim game of terror. Amen.

"Jesus Strategies for Non-violent Activism"

When Jesus looked out upon the crowd of toothless poor and victims of violence and started his teaching on God's reign of Love by saying: You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. . . I like to imagine that someone in that crowd shouted back to him: 'Now that's what I'm talking about Jesus! I can identify with you!' 'Human evolution,' wrote Walter Wink, 'has provided the species with two deeply instinctual responses to violence: flight or fight. 'In her book, The Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life, Karen Armstrong begins by writing about our 'reptilian brain,' the one that is still present underneath the more developed brain. The 'reptilian brain' is responsible for the fight/flight response in animals and the need for revenge and retribution. It is a necessary part of life when danger is near and a quick response is necessary. (Sermon Seeds, Feb. 23, 2014) I like believing that Jesus had a reptilian brain too. That he had a shadow side for taking 'eye for an eye' survival vengeance, just like you and me. That deep down in his bones was the instinct to kill the aggressor in order to eliminate the threat once and for all. Jesus had a reptilian brain too. And because he did and did not succumb to its automatic power, I can trust that his counter-intuitive, counter cultural teachings on God's reign of non-violent Love is the power of God that brings life eternal.

Jesus abhorred both the passive and violent way of dealing with evil doers in society. Why? Passivity allows evil to persist. Violence begets violence and causes people to become the evil they hate. On the lighter side he may have thought: The only thing an eye for any eye and a tooth for a tooth is good for is creating an eyeless, toothless world. Bottom line, Jesus took up the heavenly job of breaking the human cycle of violence by practicing a 'Third Way' of non-violent direct action. The classic teaching text for making his third way operational is Matthew 5:38-42. 'Turn the other cheek,' 'Give the undergarment', and 'Go the second Mile' are liberating tactics for those who are victims of systematic oppression, people rendered powerless by the occupation of armed forces, and the poor who have been forced into poverty by corrupt and unjust economic practices.

Turn the other cheek. Biblical scholar Walter Wink explained: 'A back handed slap was the usual way of admonishing inferiors: masters backhanded slaves; husbands, wives; parents, children; men, women; Romans, Jews. We have here a set of unequal relations, in each of which retaliation would invite retribution. The only normal response would be submission. . . Why then does Jesus counsel these already humiliated people to turn the other cheek? Because this action confounds a backhanded slap, thus robbing the oppressor of the power to humiliate and to keep a superior position in the relationship. Gandhi taught: 'the first principle of nonviolent action is that of non-cooperation with everything humiliating.' The move denies de-humanization and secures one's status of equality. A black woman, so the story goes, was walking on a South African street with her children when a white man, passing, spit in her face. She stopped and said, "Thank you, and now for the children." Robbed of the power to humiliate he was unable to respond'. (Engaging, p.176-177, 191)

Give the undergarment. Wink explained: 'The second example occurs in a court of law. The situation Jesus speaks to is all too familiar to his hearers: the debtor has sunk even deeper into poverty, the debt cannot be repaid, and his creditor has summoned him to court to exact repayment by legal means. Peasant indebtedness in first century Palestine was a direct result of Roman imperial policy and Jewish money lenders who were party to the reduction of an entire social class to landlessness, destitution, and abasement. Nakedness was taboo in Judaism and shame fell less on the naked party than on the person viewing or causing the nakedness (Gen. 9:20-27) Jesus' counsel to strip naked in a legal situation where structural change is not going to happen is meant to empower the oppressed to seize the opportunity to take on the entire system, by unmasking the cruelty of the system and burlesquing its pretensions to justice. Humor, ridicule, and absurdity have a role in shocking people awake to the meaning of their acts and offer the opportunity to repent and change. During the struggle of Solidarity in Poland, one group dressed in Santa Claus outfits distributed scarce sanitary napkins to women as a way of

dramatizing the difficulty of obtaining essentials. When these Santa were arrested, other Santas showed up at jail insisting the others were frauds, that they were the real Santas'.

(*ibid*, p. 177-78, 191)

Go the second mile. 'The third example is set in a military situation during Roman occupation. In Jesus' day, soldiers could force Jews to carry their heavy gear for one mile and one mile only. Jews could not refuse the hated forced service but the soldier could be flogged for requiring more than one mile. So why then, did Jesus advise those in involuntary servitude to say to the legionnaire when he reached down to take his back pack: "Oh no, let me carry it another mile!?" It was a Jesus strategy for breaking an internalized victim and servile mentality. It works as the underdog changes up the power over dynamics of the oppressor by creating a conflict situation for him to think about'. (*ibid*, p.182-183) *Several* years back when a woman was starting to unload her groceries into the trunk of her car, a big man appeared out of no-where, forcefully demanding that she let him help her with the groceries. Instead of engaging him in a useless struggle to push him away, she turned her eyes toward the store, started waving her hands, and began to gleefully shout to a man just coming out of the door: "Hi honey, I'm over here!" The man stopped, turned and ran away. 'Most assailants', says Angie O'Gorman, 'work from a definite set of expectations about how the victim will respond, and they need the victim to act as a victim. A violent or hostile response, or one of panic or helplessness, reinforces the assailant's expectations, self-confidence, and sense of control. This is a game assailants know how to play. They can handle what they are prepared for. Using violent resistance to resolve the situation is limiting oneself to the rules of the game as laid down by the assailant. Wonder by contrast, tends to diffuse hostility. It seems to be nearly impossible for the human psyche to be in a state of wonder and a state of cruelty at the same time'. (p. 234)

Jesus said: You have heard it said, but I say to you . . .

Turn your cheek. Disarm the power of humiliation.

Give your garment. Unmask cruelty and systemic injustices.

Go the extra mile. Confound the aggressor.