

Being a disciple of Jesus is costly. Loyalty to Jesus Christ may cause division, rather than peace. Referring to the cross and his resurrection as 'baptism,' Jesus says, 'How distressed I am until it is completed!' A life of faith is about aligning ourselves with Jesus, trusting him to discern the Holy Spirit's calling in our time. (Growing in Intimacy with God Through Scripture, 1382 Let Jesus Carry Your Stress)

Luke 12:49-56

Jesus said: "I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled. I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed! Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! From now on, five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three, they will be divided. father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, Mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother in law." He also said to the crowds, "when you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, 'it is going to rain,' and so it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing and you say, 'there will be scorching heat,' and it happens. You hypocrites!: You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?"



Prayer. God of Love, in our weeping for fallen stars, join us with others who weep. Align us with Jesus, trusting him to discern the Holy Spirit's wisdom on compassionate ways to end injustice and violence in our families, streets, and nation. Amen.

"To Carry or Not to Carry"

One division in Christ's church today centers on gun ownership and regulation. In his Sojourner's article entitled, 'Should Christians Own Guns?' Rob Schenck wrote: Sitting at a dining-room table full of fellow evangelical pastors, I asked how many were "carrying" (a euphemism for being armed with a concealed handgun.). They all raised their hands. Then I asked, "what determines when you draw your gun and prepare to shoot another human being?" There was awkward body language and mumbling. After a few seconds passed, one older man said, "I'll tell you what determines whether I draw the gun or not. It's the man's skin color." I was left speechless by the pastor's jarring, blatant racism. Still, as respectfully as possible, I asked him to please clarify what he meant. "Well, we got a big city nearby, and, you know, the black people there are always killin' people. Now, if a colored man comes into this county, I know he means trouble because he knows he doesn't belong here. That makes him more dangerous than a white man. That's why I'd pull my gun. I am one of them when it comes to a statement of faith-but not when it comes to race and guns'. (Sojourners, 9/16)

(Then from the pain of his broken heart he heard Jesus Cry: "You hypocrites! Father, these gun carrying church people really stress me out!")

White evangelicals have one of the highest rates of gun ownership in the U.S. and are the least likely to support gun regulation. This, states Rev. Schenck, puts his evangelical conservative church in a state of theological emergency. Why? Because pro-gun enthusiasm internalizes temptations that cause Jesus lovers to abandon faith in Almighty God as Protective Shepherd and Pruning Vinedresser of the Lord's human family. He identified four of them.

The temptation to kill. 'Whenever someone carries a deadly weapon he or she must be ready to kill. . . Readiness to kill changes our disposition toward others. We must view the people around us through a lethal lens, asking, "whom will I kill?" When will I kill? For what will I kill? For whom will I kill? In carrying a gun for protection one must also risk killing the wrong

person, either because one shoots mistakenly or unjustifiably or because somebody is killed by a stray bullet’.

(Through this temptation The Living Christ cries: In respecting the second amendment be careful not to violate the Commandment ‘do not kill,’ and the New Testament Jesus principle to love one’s neighbor.)

The temptation to objectify others. ‘The contemplation of taking another human life requires that we dehumanize certain people in our minds and hearts. We must mentally place them into a “disposable class”, or view them as collateral damage. This depersonalization leads to the false idea that it’s not a life that has been taken only a ‘threat’ that has been ‘neutralized.’

(Through this temptation The Living Christ cries: In respecting the second amendment, be careful not to violate the Jesus principle to love one’s enemy.)

The temptation of power. A gun creates an allure for its owner to become the most powerful person in any encounter with another individual. In fact, the possession of a deadly weapon creates the illusion that the gun owner dominates all others in any given space. ‘Packing heat’ fuels ‘power-over’ dominance.

(Through this temptation The Living Christ cries: In respecting the second amendment, take care to model Jesus’ cross way of emptying oneself of power.)

The temptation of fear. The primary interest in defensive gun ownership and use among evangelicals is driven by fear of everything from home invasions and carjacking to end-times, apocalyptic persecution of Christians. This fear trades in trust in Divine Protection and the Biblical faith command to ‘fear not’, for a fantastical pearl-handled revolver and silver bullet. For a Christian to transfer fear, from God to an earthly entity, is to commit a form of idolatry.

(Through this temptation The Living Christ cries: In respecting the Second Amendment, we must be careful we don’t violate the second of the Ten Commandments, which prohibits the worship of idols made by human hands; and the New Testament Jesus teaching to only fear God.)

Fear, power-over dominance, dehumanization of others, and killing readiness weakens the church’s mission of preserving life

and the dignity of human beings. They also block the Holy Spirit’s compassionate work of connecting head with heart by drying up tears that need be shed over the taking of life and the death of any human being. ‘Michael Brown was a young high school graduate who was heading to college. He was raised by his mom, who did everything right. She worked at a well-known St. Louis grocery store chain, along with one of her church’s bright graduate students. Michael had a father and stepfather who loved him. He was no saint, but if the right to live was reserved for saints alone, every pew in America would be empty. . . Michael was a black man in a world that does not value black lives. There was nothing unique about the death of an unarmed black teenager at the hands of an overzealous police officer, It happens all the time. What made his situation untenable for the community was the fact that he lay on the ground for over three hours. His mother could not hold him. There was no real attempt to save his life. He lay on the street in front of the community---including children to whom he was like a big brother---and he died.’ (from intro. To ‘Race in a Post-Obama America)

(Now is time they heard the Living Christ say, for broken hearts whose star has just fallen from the sky, to lament and to weep with those who weep).

Jesus wept
And in his weeping he joined himself forever
to those who mourn,
He stands now throughout all time,
This Jesus weeping with his arms about the weeping ones;
‘Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.’
He stands with the mourners for his name is God-With-Us.

Jesus wept.
In the godforsaken, obscene quicksand of life,
There is a deafening alleluia,
rising from the souls of those who weep,
and of those who weep with those who weep.
If you watch, you will see, the hand of God
Putting the stars back in their skies, one by one.