

Jeremiah 4:11-12, 22-28.

At that time this people and Jerusalem will be told, "A scorching wind from the barren heights in the desert blows toward my people, but not to winnow or cleanse; a wind too strong for that comes from me. Now I pronounce my judgments against them. "For my people are foolish, they do not know me; they are stupid children, they have no understanding. They are skilled in doing evil, but do not know how to do good." I looked on the earth, and lo, it was waste and void; and to the heavens, and they had not light. I looked on the mountains, and lo, they were quaking, and all the hills moved to and fro. I looked, and lo, there was no one at all, and all the birds of the air had fled. I looked, and lo, the fruitful land was a desert, and all its cities were laid in ruins before the Lord, before his fierce anger. For thus says the Lord: The whole land shall be a desolation; yet I will not make a full end. Because of this the earth shall mourn, and the heavens above grow black; for I have spoken, I have purposed; I have not relented nor will I turn back.

Luke 15:1-10.

Now all the tax-collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." So he told them this parable: "Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who need no repentance. Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

The earliest known image of Jesus found in the catacomb of Calistus (dated 217 CE) was that of Jesus carrying a sheep over his shoulders.

'The Way of Jesus'

**END
WAR**

**There is joy in the presence of angels
over one sinner who repents.**

Luke 15:10

It was campfire time on the Ashton back porch. The fiery flames had melted into glowing coals, and the full moon had begun spying on us through the darkness of the trees. After licking the last of the some-mores off our fingers it was time to tell ghost stories. I began with a lame monster one. Nobody got scared. Grampy followed up with an even milder were-wolf story which only made every one laugh. Seven year old grandson Henry, passed. Great-Grammy Hamel tried to tell an 'Old Man Scorpino' terrifying tale but couldn't remember the punch line. So, with four failed attempts at scaring the pants off everyone preceding her, five year old Rose spoke next. Giving it her best shot she began. 'Once upon a time there were scary moon monsters that came out to catch children at night.' But before she could get into the details, Henry began sobbing uncontrollably. "Stop, say it's not true!" he screamed. "But it is true," she insisted. "My friend told me so!" "No it's not!" "Yes it is!" "Please, tell me it's not!" he cried. "Henry," I said, "believe me, it's not true. There are no moon monsters coming after you." To which the fearful young soul replied: "I don't believe you---Rosie said there are!"

From a very early age each of us personalizes a belief system that helps our developing ego deal with the fear of being harmed. We do this in part by internalizing beliefs of those we love and trust; by forming a dynamic God image of ultimate power in our mind's eye; and by identifying with our culture's political defense strategies against moon monsters. One of the

oldest and most deeply entrenched dynamics in the political belief system of our mind's eye, is the practice of redemptive violence. In one of her sermons, Barbara Brown Taylor helped the congregation begin thinking about redemptive violence by telling a story about the way in which ancient Babylonians internalized and authorized their god image to deal with fears of being harmed. She wrote: The basic idea of redemptive violence is as old as the Babylonian religion that pre-dated Judaism. According to that faith, the world was created when Marduk, the god of Babylon, killed his mother Tiamat, the goddess of the ocean. With her death, chaos was tamed. Marduk created the cosmos from her dead body, and the king of Babylon became Marduk's representative on earth. The King's job was to maintain order. He was entrusted with keeping the peace, and whenever things got out of hand, he simply imitated his namesake Marduk by crushing the opposition. Violence was his divine right. It was how the world was made, and it was the only thing strong enough to keep chaos at bay. . . . We can act horrified by this if we want to, but it is how we live every day. The average American child watches 36,000 hours of television by the time he or she is eighteen, including some 15,000 murders. Some of these murders are committed by villains, but just as many are carried out by superheroes. From Popeye to Batman to Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, we have taught our children that violence is bad only if the bad guys do it. If the good guys do it, then everyone is allowed to cheer. Or, in the words of Dick Tracy, "Violence is golden when it is used to put evil down." We arm ourselves to keep the peace. We kill people who kill people to show them that killing people is wrong.

(adapted from Sermons, p. 107-108)

In the Sojourner's article, 'Toward a New Theology of Peace: Are "pacifism" and "just war" the only choices?' Terrance Rynne (author of *Jesus Christ, Peacemaker* and founder of the Marquette University Center for Peacemaking) wrote: 'This spring, the Vatican hosted a historic convocation focused on what Pope Francis called "the active witness of nonviolence as a 'weapon' to achieve peace." Eighty participants from around the world told striking, at times heroic, stories of nonviolent peacemaking at the Rome gathering, convened by the Catholic

peace movement Pax Christi International and the Vatican's justice and peace office. . . . The convocation concluded with an astonishing document, presented to Pope Francis, entitled "an appeal to the Catholic Church to recommit to the centrality of gospel nonviolence." Recommendations included a request for a papal encyclical calling Christians to return to their fundamental vocation of nonviolent peacemaking. That means rejecting just war theory as the 'settled teaching' of the church and replacing it with Jesus' life and teaching as the foremost guide.' The reasons behind their recommendation were threefold. First. 'The call of Jesus to be pro-active makers of peace has been strangled in the church because just war theory was made the centerpiece of church teaching on war. The focus on war has diverted Christians from the real challenge of building cultures of peace—preventing war, solving conflicts before they fester, building community, and reconciling peoples. Second. The early church consistently followed the Sermon on the Mount . . . they refused to join the revolt against Rome . . . they returned love for hate as they endured Roman persecution. Third. Active non-violence is both faithful and effective. . . In ground -breaking data by Erica Chenoweth on more than 300 resistance campaigns, it was found that "between 1900 and 2006, campaigns of non-violent resistance were more than twice as effective as their violent counterparts."

In Christianity, the cross is the symbol of the power of God's undying and life giving love that stills all fears and gives strength to the human heart. Taylor concludes: 'Day by day Jesus invites us to follow him---not Marduk, not Batman---the one who would not resort to violence, not even to save his own life---the one who fought back by refusing to fight back and who replaced the myth of redemptive violence with the truth of indestructible love. Here, then is another way to redeem the world: not by killing off the troublemakers but by dying to violence once and for all. Because he did, we can. He died to show us how. We live to show him we got the message' (ibid, p. 109).

Prayer. Merciful God, still our fears, increase our faith, and lead us into everlasting life. Amen.