

Sermon TUMC — October 24, 2021

Season of Peacemaking: Peace 101

Luke 6: 27 – 38

Psalm 37: 1 – 11, 39 – 40

Michele Rizoli

Hands on the wheel

So I'm thinking about my sermon, and I find myself stuck in traffic. I'm driving, my son Lucas is in the passenger seat, my grandchildren are in the passenger seat. We're trying to distract them as best we can.

It's a traffic jam and I decide to start working on my sermon, and I ask my son. "What do you remember being taught about pacifism?" He said that he remember, Grandpa — my Dad, Kenneth Schwartzenuber taking him aside and telling him all about what it means to be a pacifist. He remembers only two occasions when Grandpa was specific about teaching him something. One was to teach him about pacifism and the other was to teach him about how a basic engine runs.

So we started talking about this, and then I asked him if he would please read the Luke passage for me, to get it back into my consciousness. And as he reads "love your enemies, the five year old grandchild in the back looks up from his Nintendo DS and says: Love your enemies?! That doesn't make sense."

And so we begin a conversation and, eventually we remember a level in Super Mario Brothers where Bowser ("the bad guy") helps Mario and their work together to get to with Mario the castle.

Then the three-year- old granddaughter pipes up and wonders: "Wait a minute, isn't Bowser the bad guy?" And so the conversation continues. We talk about Junior Bowser, and that for him Bowser is not a bad guy, Bowser is his daddy. And how complicated it is to label people as good and bad.

So it was a very interesting insightful conversation. First to realize how deeply ingrained the us vs them is in our society, that a 5 year old and a 3 year old are already speaking in those terms.

Secondly it put me in mind of the Deuteronomy passage that inspires our Christian Education here at church:

Deuteronomy 6

⁵You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. ⁶Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. ⁷Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are

away, when you lie down and when you rise. ⁸Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, ⁹and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”

I thought of it like carving words on a desk, or on a tree or something that every time that comes up there is a story to tell.

And so this is how it was with my Dad. To him it was really something that was part of his life, and when the occasion came up he took the opportunity to talk to his grandson.

I should also say, while I'm still in the "Hands on the steering wheel" section of my sermon, that my Dad would also say that the hardest place to be a pacifist was behind a steering wheel! And I confess that I inherited the road-rage gene. And so I try to imagine that the person in the other car is one of you, and how would it look if I took my rage out on you.

Anyway, we need to take our opportunities to speak about peace and about peacemaking that are at the heart of the Christian way and the way we've chosen to live out the gospel.

We normally did a Peace Sunday, here at TUMC, then we decided to mark 2 Sundays, but now we've gone ahead and decided to go ahead and have Peace Month. We have entered into a Season of Peacemaking. And I thought what better place to start than Peacemaking 101? And so we go straight to the words and the life of Jesus for us to see what peacemaking looked like when Jesus set it out.

We do call ourselves a peace church in the in the Mennonite-Anabaptist tradition. And that tradition is one of peace, pacifism and non-violence.

Hands on faces

We come to Jesus' words.

Luke 6: 27 – 38

'But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.

If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt.

Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again.

Do to others as you would have them do to you.

'If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same.

If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again.

But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for [God] is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your [Heavenly parent] is merciful.

'Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.'

Straight from Jesus, and pretty clear. I thought about just getting up, reading that, and saying to you "Take it from away." But I do want to expand a bit, because, of course, it's not that simple.

I want to let you know that I'm borrowing heavily from a lovely book by Hyung Jin Kim Sun, (whom we know as Pablo) *Who are our Enemies and how do we love them?*(I will give away this copy to anyone under 25 who would like a copy.)

We hope to follow Jesus' example, what is that example?

Pablo says it like this, that Jesus' attitude toward violence was a mix "courage and prudence." So if we look at Jesus' life, he avoided dangerous situations. There was that time when people came around and were threatening to throw him off a cliff. What did he do? Did he say "Fine, push me over!?" No, he got out of there and went somewhere so that they could not do that to him.

There were times when the religious leaders were threatening his life in Jerusalem. What did he do? He stayed out of town with his friends, Lazarus, Mary and Martha. So that he wouldn't be a focus of their attention.

But then there were times when he faced the violence head on. In the Garden of Gethsemane, when the soldiers came to take him prisoner — after he had prayed and asked God to take that away — when he saw it happening. Peter took out his sword and cut off a soldier's ear. And Jesus took him aside and said: "those who live by the sword, die by the sword." If you're going to use violence, that will be the method used.

He told Peter to put away his sword, he healed the man and he turned himself over to be crucified. And when he was being crucified he prayed: "God, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Now Mennonites sometimes think that we're the only ones who read peace from the Gospel. And that is not true. It's right there, anyone who is paying attention can see this. So in September, Bishop John Selby Spong, passed away — he was a controversial figure in theological world. He poked holes in a lot of ways of thinking for Christians. . He had a really interesting insight in a recent interview I heard, about how Jesus went against the “us versus them” prevailing mentality. So I'd like to share an audio clip with you.

[audio about how Jesus crossed boundaries, around the midway point. <https://www.cbc.ca/listen/live-radio/1-59/clip/15872439>]

So he identifies yet another layer in the example of Jesus' life. That Jesus transcends “tribal boundaries,” that he intentionally goes beyond all the us and them categories that we create. Jesus lived as a peacemaker, in so doing.

Here's how Pablo said it pg. 17

“Jesus teaches us to love our enemies because we are God's children and as children do, we imitate our parent. God loves the ungrateful, the wicked, the evil and the unrighteous just as God loves the good and the righteous. By treating people indiscriminately we participate in God's character.”

An important note is that there are no guarantees in this teaching from Jesus. He is not telling us to love our enemies because through loving them we might convert them or make a better world. — though one would certainly hope that could be a positive side effect. But it really is about who we are in the world and who we want to be in the world.

So now, since this is Peacemaking 101, I want to show you a picture. You can't preach a Mennonite sermon without showing this one. This is Dirk Willems.



This is a classic story coming from the Martyrs Mirror - a book that chronicles the experiences of early Anabaptist Martyrs

Dirk was in prison because of his Anabaptist faith, which at the time was also a political statement. He was a political prisoner because of his faith. He knew that he was going to die, so he took some rags and made a rope, got out the window and reached the moat of the castle where he was. That moat was frozen, but Dirk, fortunately or unfortunately, is rather skinny because of his time in prison, so he started walking on the ice. Pretty soon a guard sees that he's getting away and starts to come after him. Of course the guard has been well fed, and as soon as he steps on the ice he falls in. Then Dirk turns around and reaches out his hands to help the guard be saved, and not drown or freeze to death. Then the guard does what guards do: he takes him prisoner and takes him back and puts him in an even more fortified room where Dirk cannot get away.

I would love a different ending to that story, but that is not what happened. It's a story about Dirk living into his character of compassion for his enemy.

If that story doesn't sit with you very well, don't worry. That's OK. Struggle with it, figure out what it is that makes you wonder about that story, what makes you uncomfortable, or what makes you smug about it. Consider how Jesus' example played out in Dirk's life. And how that character might play out in ours.

Two hands of nonviolence

The last set of hands that I want to talk to you about are the two hands of nonviolence.

My Dad, whom I mentioned before. Was raised immediately in post-World War II. He was just young enough that he wouldn't have been able to be a soldier or a conscientious objector if he had chosen that. He was deeply formed by the teachings of the church at the time, which were to be a conscientious objector — meaning that if you're asked to go to war you say "No" — and by practicing non-resistance. Non-resistance in the days that they were talking about this in Mennonite circles, meant that if you were slapped on the face, you would just take it. It was a non-reactive response. In the days since my Dad was formed, people have been struggling with this and wondering what it is that Jesus was really teaching. Is it really just to take it?

And so there is another classic that I need to mention to you, in this Peacemaking 101 session we're having, and that is a scholar named Walter Wink. He takes the passage as mentioned in Matthew (which mentions right cheek and left cheek).

[Demonstrate how it was most likely a back-handed slap across the face]

Being hit on the right cheek is a gesture of disdain, it is a gesture of someone who has power over someone else. It's the shut up gesture. It's the 'how dare you?' gesture. So when Jesus invites us to turn the other cheek it's more a gesture that means not backing down, but standing firm in the face of that violence.

I'm oversimplifying but it is an important distinction. Do you just take it or are you standing non-violently in opposition to that violence that is coming at you.

Activist Barbara Deming, according to Pablo, talks about how we should have the two hands of non violence. One hand says "stop" and the other invites to further relationship. That is the idea of turning the other cheek: you are essentially asking "Are you really going to do it this way?" And then you invite further conversation.

"One hand is lifted strongly and is signalling the enemy to stop. The gesture of this hand indicates that I stand against your wrong deed or oppressive act, I am not participating in it and I am going to do everything I can except use violence, to stop you. At the same time the other hand is outstretched graciously indicating that I will never give up on you, that I will constantly love you ,and that I believe you are valuable as well. This image captures Jesus is called to seek to actively stop violence without using violence and to always be reaching out to offer love. (Pg 29)

Finally, one more concept that we need to include in peacemaking 101. Living in line with a long peace church tradition, we are used to thinking about how we understand God's dream, we call that of Shalom, it is also the kinship that Jesus proclaimed.

Shalom (Salam), means peace. Quoting Pablo quoting Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggeman "Shalom is the central vision of world history in the Bible that all creation is one, every creature in community with one another, living in harmony in security toward the joy and well-being of every other creature. It bears tremendous freight – the freight of a dream of God that resists all our tendencies to division hostility fear drivenness and misery."

This is our stance in relation to a world that is formatted by violence.

Finally, we are not working for peace from our own strength alone, but from a place of the humility of our spiritual convictions, of our aligning ourselves with the Jesus Way, of God's Spirit working within us to transform us more and more into God's character that reflects God's love.

Go and be peacemakers.

Shalom.