

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God... In the name of the one who modeled perfect nonviolent resistance by giving himself for us, Amen!

As I was getting ready for today's sermon, I started to hear a cacophony of mystical voices echoing in my head and my heart: **Rabbi Jesus** saying that we should love our enemies (which, believe it or not, is considered by most to be the central theme of Jesus's earthly ministry); I heard Gandhi reminding me Jesus actually practiced perfect non-violence represented by the Sermon on the Mount (which Gandhi read every day for 40 years).

From Anne's message last week, I heard **Henri Nouwen** reminding us that there are really only two perspectives to choose from, the perspective of fear or the perspective of love; I heard **Richard Rohr** reminding us that Jesus is never actually upset at sinners but, he is upset at people who do not think they are sinners.

I heard the Dalai Lama saying that **his greatest enemy** of peace is hatred and negative anger. Not the Chinese who invaded his beloved Tibet but he considers the anger within to be his greatest enemy.

And, the list goes on, St. Francis, Joan Chittister, Evelyn Underhill, Brian McLaren, John Dear, Jim Finley, and we're about to spend some time with Jim Wallis.

But suffice it to say, they all agree on one central theme, we are called to be peacemakers and not conflict makers. **And the only way to pull that off is to learn how to love our enemies. Disclaimer folks, I don't pretend to know how to love my enemies but, I'm pretty sure I'm gonna work on it for the rest of my life. And as we like to say at the end of our service, life is getting shorter, isn't it? I have to try and in the trying, every so often, I get a moment of clarity that gives me hope.**

In chapter 6 of the False White Gospel, Jim Wallis remembers a moment of hope when a number of faith leaders gathered just across the street from the capitol on January 6th, 2023 to hold a sunrise **prayer vigil** for democracy. Unlike the insurrectionists who attacked democracy two years earlier, these faith leaders were intent on reclaiming the Day of Epiphany, January 6th on the church calendar, when we remember three wise men, "ancient elders who followed a star in search of new hope

and new life, seeking a manifestation of Christ the Messiah, who they believed was coming.” Jim writes;

We gathered at the Capitol intent on restoring the corrupted spirit of January 6 with the revelation of the **true Christ** who stands in stark contrast to the false representation and the heresy on display two years prior, **the idol made in the dark spirit of white Christian nationalism**. The insurrectionists came to take, not give; to divide, not unite; to hurt, not heal. **They came not to make peace in the name of truth, but to commit violence in defense of a lie (that the election had been stolen)**. They carried not just Confederate flags, revealing the racism at the roots of their indignation, but Christian symbols—flags, crosses, and pictures of Jesus. And when they took over the floor of the Senate, they paused and offered prayers literally shouting Jesus’ name...” (The False White Gospel, pp153-154).

So how do we do respond? How do we respond to those who really don’t even care about who Jesus really was, let alone about liberty and justice for all? It’s easier said than done, that’s for sure. So, let’s begin by talking about who are the peacemakers?

Peacemakers are those who work to overcome conflict, literally, the ones who are called to settle quarrels. But that doesn’t mean we just sit there and say nothing. Silent complicity is not the answer. It takes a little bit of courage and a little bit of curiosity. As Anne pointed out last week, a Samaritan offering compassionate care to a Jewish man was an example of mercy that shocked Jesus’ listeners.

That would be like a Gazan offering sustenance to an Israeli commando who was all alone after one of his bombs hit him by mistake. Or maybe a Democrat helping a Trump supporter change their tire on a lonely highway at night. **Being a neighbor is showing mercy, regardless of the recipient’s beliefs or politics**. The only way that happens is if “love your enemies” comes into play. We still refuse to back down, **we take a stand** for what we know to be true but we do so without name calling, ridiculing, or demeaning.

And just to be clear:

Love your enemies doesn't mean condoning the actions of those who are intent on sacrificing our democracy in order to prop up a false white gospel that would prefer an autocracy. But, it seems to me that in order to love my enemies, I need to adopt the nonviolent resistance that was modeled by Jesus.

Love your enemies means to unite instead of divide, to find common ground and in pursuit of that common ground, to risk our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor. John Dear, in his book The Nonviolent Life quotes MLK who said shortly before he was assassinated, "**At the center of nonviolence stands the principle of love.** To retaliate with hate and bitterness would do nothing but intensify the hate in the world. Along the way of life, someone must have sense enough and morality enough **to cut off the chain of hate.**"

And, in order to **cut off the chain of hate**, we have to realize that waging peace can be just as costly as waging war. We have to show up. Why is there no peace? Because there are too few peacemakers. Wallis quotes Daniel Berrigan, Jesuit priest and antiwar activist who said "There are no makers of peace because the making of peace is at least as costly as the making of war—at least as liable to bring disgrace and prison and death in its wake." Until we learn that the moral equivalent to waging war is the waging of peace, we will not see an end to **the chain of hate.**" (p164)

Here are two examples of institutional evil that continue to persist because there are no peacemakers: We need more peacemakers to take a united stand for police reform and the criminal (in)justice reform. Wallis remembers a gathering of warring gang members who met in Kansas City thanks to the courage of then mayor Emmanuel Cleaver. He invited them to a prayer breakfast and "stood with these angry young men for hours until he gained their trust." That event led to Barrios Unidos, neighborhoods united, where the most common theme is a call for **transformational reform** of the criminal justice system "that too often works to create, extend, and exacerbate the problems of poverty and violence...through racialized policing and mass incarceration." (p.163)

When I get called into Cottage Hospital late at night for a gunshot wound or a knife stabbing, it usually involves a Latino gang member who is a lot younger than you might imagine. It is HEART BREAKING to see young men around the age of my 14

year old grandson, Hudson, forced by systemic poverty and self-survival to fight gang wars over turf, and who controls the drug trade in their neighborhood. What can we do to offset this systemic failure in our beautiful Santa Barbara community. Maybe we could host a Barrios Unidos gathering at Trinity in conjunction with our Catholic community? Wouldn't that be something? Why would we do that? Because we need more peacemakers.

Secondly, we have to take a stand against America's love affair with guns, PERIOD. The parents are calling. "Americans overwhelmingly support, by over 88 percent, universal background checks for purchasing guns. 60% favor banning all assault **weapons**. Begging the question, if America supports some forms of gun control like these, why aren't our elected leaders legislating the needed laws? Because, we need more peacemakers elected to Congress. (P173)

Folks, the only way this is going to happen is if we act our way into a new way of living by becoming active nonviolent proponents for things like gun control, police reform, prison reform along with systemic issues like gay rights and a woman's right to choose.

Becoming a witness for peace is obviously not for the faint of heart. I believe a change of heart can take place only when we choose to heed the call to love our enemies and join the grassroots movement for nonviolent resistance to the false white gospel that seeks to divide us instead of unite us. It started in March of 1963, when thousands of children marched through the streets of Birmingham right up to the firemen, heeding the call of Dr. King. "Nonviolent suffering love is always redemptive," he said in every talk. "We will match your capacity to inflict suffering with our capacity to accept suffering and we will wear you down until justice comes." Police chief Bull Connor went ballistic. "Turn on the hoses," he screamed at the firemen. The marchers knelt in prayer. (Dear, NonViolent Life, p. 116-117) In 1963, I was in the 8th grade. I watched that happen on TV. That and the assassination of President Kennedy in November of the same year had a lasting impact that changed the course of my life.

At the start of this homily, I admitted that I have a long way to go before I will embody a nonviolent presence that enables me to love my enemies by standing calmly while others scream vitriol at me. Nevertheless I choose to persist and I hope you will

join me. We need each other to pull this off and become who we were created to be: CHILDREN OF GOD. Supporting each other in this pursuit will not be easy but if we are willing to sacrifice together for the collective shalom, then maybe, just maybe, our children will come to realize what that old hippie song, The Age of Aquarius **promised** in 1969 when I was a sophomore at Westmont College: hope that harmony and understanding will have the final say in a multiracial democracy in the United States of America.

I hear Sister Joan Chittister's voice in my head and my heart right now, saying, "The Time is Now!"

**In the name of the One who practiced non-violence to the very end,
Amen!**

(A portion of John Dear's prayer for a nonviolent life that was not read in today's sermon) Loving God, "Help us to serve your reign of peace. Make us instruments of your peace, that we might do our part to help abolish war, poverty, hunger, racism, sexism, executions, nuclear weapons, systemic injustice and environmental destruction, and welcome your nonviolent reign of peace with justice here on earth as it is done in Heaven. Bless this grassroots movement of nonviolence with your wisdom, your determination, and your persistent action that we might see "justice roll down like waters" and welcome new breakthroughs of justice and peace every day. As we follow the nonviolent Jesus on the path of peace and love, help us to claim our true identity as your beloved sons and daughters, that we might always live in your peace and love, and serve your reign of peace and love, now and forever."