

Sermon 24.02.04

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Matthew 5: 21-22; 43-46

'You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, "You shall not murder"; and "whoever murders shall be liable to judgment." But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, "You fool", you will be liable to the hell of fire.

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?

6 Principles of Nonviolence (from *Stride toward Freedom*, pp 83-88)

PRINCIPLE ONE: *Nonviolence is a way of life for courageous people.*

It is active nonviolent resistance to evil.

It is aggressive spiritually, mentally, and emotionally.

PRINCIPLE TWO: *Nonviolence seeks to win friendship and understanding.*

The end result of nonviolence is redemption and reconciliation.

The purpose of nonviolence is the creation of the 'Beloved Community.'

PRINCIPLE THREE: *Nonviolence seeks to defeat injustice, not people.*

Nonviolence recognizes that evildoers are also victims and are not evil people.

The nonviolent resister seeks to defeat evil, not people.

PRINCIPLE FOUR: *Nonviolence holds that suffering can educate and transform.*

Nonviolence accepts suffering without retaliation.

Unearned suffering is redemptive and has tremendous educational and transforming possibilities.

PRINCIPLE FIVE: *Nonviolence chooses love instead of hate.*

Nonviolence resists violence of the spirit as well as the body.

Nonviolent love is spontaneous, unselfish, and creative.

PRINCIPLE SIX: *Nonviolence believes that the universe is on the side of justice.*

The nonviolent resister has deep faith that justice will eventually win.

Nonviolence believes that God is a God of justice.

## SERMON

[Slide show](#)

(IMAGE)

### **PRINCIPLE ONE:**

**Nonviolence is a way of life for courageous people.**

**It is active nonviolent resistance to evil.**

**It is aggressive spiritually, mentally, and emotionally.**

I am grateful to be rooted in our Mennonite tradition of nonviolence; rooted in the belief that Jesus calls us to another way. One of being courageous; resisting, actively, without violence.

Today I mostly bring this wrestling of mine, believing that many of you hold similar questions. As our country continues to ramp up military response, again, I feel an urgency to again hold these teachings.

**Nonviolence is a way of life for courageous people.**

It's a way of life. That implies consistent engagement. Not suddenly waking up when there's a high profile event like the killing of George Floyd - reading, learning, engaging... and then going back to our old ways.

MLK writes: He who passively accepts evil is as much involved in it as he who helps to perpetrate it. He who accepts evil without protesting against it is really cooperating with it.

It's a way of life.

What does that ask of me? Of us?

**Nonviolence is a way of life for courageous people.**

Our scripture was spoken, and written in a time of occupation. Jesus lived in an occupied land, under a violent empire. It's from that place that he taught with authority - not like the other leaders. But from a place of deep knowing.

Jesus told those who lived under that empire - ‘You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, “You shall not murder”; and “whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.” But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, “You fool”, you will be liable to the hell of fire. (WOW!)

and he didn’t stop there, continuing:

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...

What does it mean to faithfully live into these teachings today?

I want this to be a conversation. How we live this - in our day to day lives; how we support a government that since its inception has been engaged in violence; in the political climate of today.

The principle fleshes it out more: **It is active nonviolent resistance to evil.**

**It is aggressive spiritually, mentally, and emotionally.**

These 6 principles came out of a very specific place and time - the Montgomery Bus Boycott that took place from December 1955 until November 1956. Those leading this movement, lead by Rev. King were rooted in Jesus and informed by Gandhi’s leadership in India. These 6 principles provided a framework for coming together, as a collective, rooted in God’s promises.

As I reflect on how my energy and involvement waxes and wanes, when I lack the courage to step forward in love, rooted in Jesus, I find myself turning to stories of those who steadfastly remained engaged in the work of love, without violence.

The news can feel crushing - often leaves me feeling helpless. I need stories of those who are brave - who are courageously living these principles. These stories remind me there’s another way. The way of love.

I have a story to tell of one such courageous person - and my hope is that during sharing time you will speak about what this means, what it looks like in your journey of faith.

**Nonviolence is a way of life for courageous people.**

San Zaw Htway was a Burmese artist, political prisoner<sup>1</sup> and peace activist who died in 2017 at the age of 44. (IMAGE)

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/01/30/opinion/myanmar-coup-san-zaw-htway.html>

I watched a beautiful short film “Letter to San Zaw Htway” about his life this week, as the world marked the 3rd anniversary of the most recent military coup in Myanmar. The filmmakers invited his loved ones to write him letters as an act of remembrance and hope.

As a student leader, San Zaw Htway was arrested while protesting a military coup and sentenced to 36 years in prison, serving 13, some of it in solitary confinement.

He later recounted:

“Even in great despair, you can find happiness if you renew hope...

In jail, when they told me not to write, I wrote poems. They told me not to sing, I sang a lot. I wasn’t allowed to paint, and so I collected the plastic garbage in prison and made art out of the colorful trash. (IMAGE) This was my way of protesting their rules.”

Upon release, in 2012, he continued to serve, working as a trauma counselor to former political prisoners and teaching children and refugees to make artwork using recycled materials. (IMAGE)

In teaching art to children, he encouraged them to express their feelings without fear. Teaching them:

“With a peaceful mind, even when someone harms you... Don’t answer harm with harm.” SZH

Following his death, during this recent coup, peaceful resistance continues. (IMAGE) At the height of the protests in 2021, they brought food and water for the militia. Flowers were handed out, (IMAGE) recognizing that these soldiers are often not much older than children, forced into positions many do not want.

One friend remembers San Zwa Htways lesson of never responding with anger. “How can we do that now?” he wonders.

(IMAGE) San Zwa Htways’ artwork lives on - trash turned into beauty.

a friend writes to him: I often think of you these days, how you tried every possible way to survive in prison. This is what everyone in Myanmar must do now.... I’m so grateful for your guidance.... I will never forget you.”

(IMAGE)

Until the end of his life, San Zaw Htway retained his gentle wisdom and joy; his many years of suffering did not harden him to the world.

We have these ordinary, extraordinary people - those who give us a glimpse of what it looks like to

*Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you*

I need these stories. I need your stories - of wrestling, of engagement. I need your questions. We are a community, bound by the love of Christ.

And from that place of rootedness in Jesus' all encompassing love, we move into a time of breaking bread together, of finding nourishment and sustenance for this work.

We move into that space, recognizing how we fall short, miss the mark, sin.

We confess. Kyrie eleison, Have Mercy #796 will be our sung confession.

Confession:

Kyrie eleison, Have Mercy #796 will be sung as our confession.

Lord have mercy; christ have mercy; lord have mercy.

Pause for silence as we move into this confession.

We will sing the refrain several times. I will read the verses, giving you an opportunity to soak in these words, considering what you confess before God, then join again singing the refrain.

## Communion:

### INTRODUCTION (VT 936)

At the table of Christ, we eat this bread and drink this cup to remember the life and death and resurrection of Jesus,

To be united with Christ and with one another as the church, and to look toward a time when all will be one.

As we eat and drink with thanksgiving, Jesus the Christ is present with us empowering us by the Spirit to follow Jesus' way of love as the body of Christ, broken and blessed for the life of the world.

Breaking of bread; pouring of the cup

Invite communion servers forward - Doug M, Doug McP, Sarah, Diane

Everyone welcomed; gluten free bread

take bread and cup back to your seat and we will partake together, as one body

Prayer

End with Lord's Prayer together.

Children's time story:

The 6 principles of nonviolence were lived out, and then written down, as part of a Bus boycott that happened in Montgomery Alabama, nearly 70 years ago.

I want to tell a story about Georgia Gilmore - a woman who lived out those ideas.

### **Pies from nowhere**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M9YjLt4tpBM>

Georgia grew up in Alabama, on a farm, helping her family feed the pigs and milk the cows.

HER mom taught her 2 important lessons: Think twice before doing anything you might regret, and Never hate anyone.

Georgia became a cook at the national lunch company in downtown Montgomery, Alabama. Because of segregation laws, the restaurant counter was separated into two sections, one side for white customers. One side for black customers.

Georgia knew it was wrong, but that was the way things had always been.

On December 1, 1955, as Georgia was working at the restaurant, a news alert came over the radio. Rosa Parks, a black woman, had been arrested for refusing to give up her seat on a bus to a white passenger.

The black community gathered and made the decision to not ride the bus on Monday, that following week. Fliers were sent out all over town "Please stay off all busses". Georgia hadn't ridden the bus in months - she was treated poorly on them and found other ways to get to work. That Monday, Georgia watched as bus after bus drove by empty.

She went to Holt Baptist church to hear Rev Martin Luther King talk about next steps. That night, he talked about freedom and equality. Georgia believed in these things. She wondered how she might help support this movement.

Georgia and her friends got to work. They bought bread and lettuce and chickens. Off they went to cook. They brought meals to meetings. They sold sandwiches and dinners in their neighborhoods. As the bus boycotters walked and walked, Georgia cooked and cooked, donating all their money to help support others. She could have lost her job, but she kept on cooking. Georgia and her friends were especially good at making pies. She made pies and sold them at grocery stores, at beauty salons, at laundromats. She made and sold pie after pie!

Sweet potato pie, peach pie - cakes of all sorts.

They raised money to pay for gas to drive people to work. They even helped raise enough money to buy cars to help people get where they needed to go.

When the national lunch company found out she was working for the boycott, she was fired. Dr. King and others helped her set up a business in her own home. Word got around, and people soon started coming to Georgia's for meals, eating wherever they could find a seat.

Her home became a place for important, and often secret meetings.

On November 13, 1956, Georgia was cooking in her kitchen, when she heard that the boycotters had won. Laws had been changed. Anyone could sit in any seat on the bus. But she knew there was still work to be done, so she kept right on cooking.

Georgia lived out Jesus' command to love - to be peacemakers. She did what she knew how to do - she cooked and baked.

We all have ways to serve God - by loving others. Looking out for one another. Taking good care of each other is a way of showing our love for God.