

Kate Heinzl, UMC pastor

Zechariah 7:9-10

Thus says the LORD of hosts: Render true judgements, show kindness and mercy to one another; do not oppress the widow, the orphan, the alien, or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another.

Romans 12:14-21

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.' No, 'if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

6 Principles of Nonviolence (distilled from Stride toward Freedom, PP 82-88)

1. Nonviolence is a way of life for courageous people.
2. Nonviolence seeks to win friendship and understanding.
3. Nonviolence seeks to defeat injustice, not people.
4. Nonviolence holds that unearned, voluntary suffering can educate and transform.
5. Nonviolence chooses love instead of hate.
6. Nonviolence believes that the universe is on the side of justice.

The 1963 Birmingham Civil Rights Movement Ten Commandments¹

"I hereby pledge myself—my person and body—to the nonviolent movement, therefore I will keep the following ten commandments!"

1. MEDITATE daily on the teachings and life of Jesus.
2. REMEMBER always that the nonviolent movement (in Birmingham) seeks justice and reconciliation—not victory.
3. WALK and TALK in the manner of love, for God is love.
4. PRAY daily to be used by God in order that all (men) might be free.

¹ [The 1963 Birmingham Civil Rights Movement Ten Commandments](#)

5. SACRIFICE personal wishes in order that all (men) might be free.
6. OBSERVE with both friend and foe the ordinary rules of courtesy.
7. SEEK to perform regular service for others and for the world.
8. REFRAIN from the violence of fist, tongue, or heart.
9. STRIVE to be in good spiritual and bodily health.
10. FOLLOW the directions of the movement and of the captain on a demonstration.

This pledge was taken by all demonstrators during the Birmingham civil rights movement of 1963.

Sermon outline:

Sit for a moment with the 6 principles. Take them in. Notice if there's one that catches your attention

MLK -

his journey to making nonviolence his way of life - that didn't happen until it was tangible in the form of the Montgomery bus boycott. While he has experienced segregation and racism, he hadn't had a chance to live these principles until he was immersed in it.

He ended his formal education in 1954, moving to his first pastorate at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery AL at the age of 25.

TODD #1

“When I went to Montgomery as a pastor, I had not the slightest idea that I would later become involved in a crisis in which nonviolent resistance would be applicable. I neither started the protest nor suggested it. I simply responded to the call of the people for a spokesman. When the protest began, my mind, consciously or unconsciously, was driven back to the Sermon on the Mount, with its sublime teachings on love, and the Gandhian method of nonviolent resistance. As the days unfolded, I came to see the power of nonviolence more and more. Living through the actual experience of the protest, nonviolence became more than a method to which I have intellectual assent; it became a commitment to a way of life. Many of the things that I had not cleared up intellectually concerning nonviolence were now solved in the sphere of practical action.”²

King's journey to embracing nonviolent resistance took several years.

Growing up, he had watched the KKK on its night rides; had seen police brutality, had watched Negroes receive tragic injustice in the courts

² King, Martin Luther Jr, 1958. *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery story*. Harper and Row, NY. P. 83

TODD # 2

"I had come perilously close to resenting all white people. I had also learned that the inseparable twin of racial injustice was economic injustice."

He was first introduced to the pacifist position while at Crozer seminary. Initially he was far from convinced of the practicality of that position.

While at Crozer seminary, King traveled to Philadelphia to hear a sermon by Dr. Mordecai Johnson, president of Howard University, who had just returned from a trip to India. Dr. Johnson spoke of the life and teachings of Mahatma Gandhi.

TODD #3

'His message was so profound and electrifying that I left the meeting and bought a half-dozen books on Gandhi's life and works.'³

"As I delved deeper into the philosophy of Gandhi my skepticism concerning the power of love gradually diminished, and I came to see for the first time its potency in the area of social reform. Prior to reading Gandhi, I had about concluded that the ethics of Jesus were only effective in individual relationship. The 'turn the other cheek' philosophy and the 'love your enemies' philosophy were only valid, I felt, when individuals were in conflict with other individuals; when racial groups and nations were in conflict a more realistic approach seemed necessary. But after reading Gandhi, I saw how utterly mistaken I was. Gandhi was probably the first person in history to lift the love ethic of Jesus above mere interaction between individuals to a powerful and effective social force on a large scale... It was in this Gandhian emphasis on love and nonviolence that I discovered the method for social reform that I had been seeking...I came to feel that this was the only morally and practically sound method open to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom."⁴

Our scriptures - both Hebrew bible and New Testament call for a radical caring for all parts of the society

³ IBID. P 78.

⁴ IBID. PP 78-79.

OT reading - The prophet Zechariah was speaking to the people of Israel after the exile - they were rebuilding the holy sanctuary in Jerusalem - restoration was underway. There is hope for the future. The people are called to show kindness and mercy to one another - to not oppress the marginalized. "But they refused to listen" follows this injunction; 'they turned a stubborn shoulder and stopped their ears in order not to hear.' (Zech 7: 11)

Again and again God's laws are to care for all segments of society - and over and over, throughout countless generations, we the people do not follow the covenant.

Romans reading: Rome, at the time of Paul's letter - around the year 55 CE: The Jewish community lived in densely populated, low economic areas, and were from a wide variety of backgrounds. In our reading, Paul's vision of God meets the ordinary demands of life together. **For Paul, living in solidarity with Christ means giving up moral superiority and asserting one's rights at another's expense.**⁵

A glimpse of the beloved community.

Ten commandments of 1963 Birmingham civil rights movement.

This was a community simmering with violence. Birmingham was known as "Bombingham"⁶, as in the preceding years there were at least 50 racially motivated bombings around the city.

The black community needed tangible ways to work with violence - within themselves and out on the streets.

from the 10 commandments: Meditate, remember, walk and talk, pray...

our scripture starts with "bless those who persecute you, bless and do not curse them"

We need to prepare ourselves; need to be rooted, send down strong roots so when the storms come, we're ready.

Teach metta meditation as a blessing.

May you be free of inner and outer danger and fear.

May you be as healthy as you can be.

May you be peaceful.

May you live at ease this day.

(someone easy to love; someone neutral; someone difficult to love; larger community)

⁵ Dewey, Hoover, McGaughy and Schmidt. 2010. *The Authentic Letters of Paul*. Polebridge Press. P 211.

⁶

<http://npshistory.com/publications/bicr/index.htm#:~:text=Violence%20was%20frequently%20used%20to,city%20the%20nickname%20%22Bombingham%22.&text=By%201963%20civil%20rights%20activism%20was%20well%20destablished%20in%20Birmingham.>

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Experienced segregation/racism - but hadn't lived out these principles yet

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Our scriptures - both Hebrew bible and New Testament see everyone - **every body** as a person to be cared for.

OT reading -

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Rome, at the time of Paul's letter - around the year 55 CE:

The Jewish community lived in densely populated, low economic areas, and were from a wide variety of backgrounds.

In our reading, Paul's vision of God meets the ordinary demands of life together.

For Paul, living in solidarity with Christ means changing the way you see and live with others. No more moral superiority.¹⁰

Paul gives a glimpse of the beloved community.

TO LIVE AS THE BELOVED COMMUNITY - We need to prepare ourselves; need to be rooted in the way of Jesus.

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We have resources: Ten commandments of 1963 Birmingham civil rights movement.

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