

“The Third Way”

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2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14

Luke 9:51-62

[Jesus] rebuked them, and said,

‘You do not know what spirit you are of, for the Son of Man has not come to destroy the lives of human beings but to save them.’

Luke 9:55^b-56

Let us pray... O God,

Help us to be more creative in how we as individuals and as a nation respond to conflict.

Amen

Did you ever notice how many crime shows there are on TV?

“CSI” or “Crime Scene Investigation” has been very popular in recent years – and evolved two spinoffs, with “CSI: Miami” and “CSI: New York”.

There is also “NCIS” or “Naval Crime Investigative Service” series with a similar theme of using technology to figure out ‘whodunit’.

I haven’t seen any of these shows, but I used to watch the original “Law & Order” – in which the violence had already taken place as the skills of the detectives were called in to figure out who the suspects were.

These kinds of shows are quite popular with young people and I have been surprised at how often I’ve heard of someone wanting to be a forensic investigator like those on “CSI”.

What occurs to me as somewhat alarming is how readily we accept violence as a fact of life in our society.

There are enough real life incidents to be sure, which provide plenty of material for the film industry, but it seems like law enforcement is becoming an industry, too, and some prison systems already are.

10% of our federal and state prisons are now privatized and run by ‘for profit’ corporations. http://www.correctionsproject.com/corrections/pris_priv.htm

Southern farmers after the Civil War had been paying such prisons ‘convict leases’ to use inmates to work in their fields.

This arrangement started in 1868 and was finally outlawed by ‘the early 20th Century’ but revived in the 1980s to handle the growing number of inmates for the war on Drugs. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Private_prison

Violence has even been part of how the corporate world did business with the auto industry as a case in point.

In the early days of the Ford Motor Company, for example,

Henry Ford literally, hired thugs to walk the floors and penalize – even beat up, workers who organized, let alone talked together on the job.

Willard, p.2

Besides wars there have been terrible, violent confrontations
throughout our nation's history with domestic strife in the form of
union strikes and race riots –
people seeking justice by violence when civil discourse failed.
It is the way it has always been, 'dog eat dog', 'survival of the fittest'...

Violence has been a part of our country's founding and, sadly,
something we have come to take for granted.

Have you or someone you know, been touched by violence?

It is not always physical – sometimes it is mental, even financial,
and almost always targeting the powerless.

Even the pen can be mightier than the sword with pink slips and foreclosure notices.

We need to begin to ask why and start working to change things –
and such change must always begin with ourselves.

How often do we over-react with anger or submit to shame?

Must we always caught between fight or flight? Maybe not...

The world of ancient Israel was violent, too.

We see in the stories of Elijah some of the same crises,
not unlike our own times, as greedy powers conspire to take
what little the powerless have – like Ahab & Jezebel seizing Naboth's land,

Elijah told Ahab & Jezebel would die violent deaths – and they did.

Then, Elijah sent word to their son, Ahaziah, that he would soon follow.

Troops of that corrupt regime of Israel – which was also called Samaria,
were sent by Ahaziah to bring Elijah back from the wilderness,
and twice, he called down fire from heaven to destroy them.

However, Elijah spared a third company and returned with them
to confirm Ahaziah would die – and he did.

Soon after, Elijah finds Elisha using oxen to plow a field
and lays his mantle upon Elisha – symbolizing a call for him to follow.

Elisha asks permission to say good-bye to his family,

but like Jesus in today's Gospel lesson, Elijah chides him, as if to say,

“Leave behind the old life if you are going to be a worthy servant of God.”

Elisha sacrifices the oxen, gives them as food to his neighbors
and sets out to follow Elijah.

These events parallel the story of Christ – but with a twist.

With Jesus, something new is happening.

Willard, p.3

Jesus is introducing a new dynamic at work to transform society and bring healing to people.

Two Sundays ago, we saw *how* Jesus would spread the gospel and help mend the fabric of society torn apart by harsh Roman economic practices.

He would accomplish this by building empathy between rich homeowners and the homeless poor – by being a practical example of God's kingdom as a beloved community.

The Gospel says that Jesus 'set his face to go to Jerusalem' another way of saying he had decided to confront his enemies head on and meet his destiny.

The violent death of John the Baptist had set a series of events into motion, leading up to this time of decision.

As Jesus sets off on his journey to Jerusalem, his followers go with him, and messengers are sent ahead to arrange for lodging.

When a Samaritan village refuses to welcome Jesus, James and John suggest calling down fire from heaven to punish them, like the prophet Elijah did against the Samaritans in his day.

Jesus is outraged at this suggestion of violent retribution, saying to his disciples, "Don't you realize what Spirit you are of?"

This statement marks a departure from the sanctioned violence of Elijah's time and speaks to what appears to be a new way, a new dynamic that is in opposition to the mechanisms of domination – of 'dog eat dog' and 'survival of the fittest'.

In recent weeks I taught a class based on an article called, "Biblical Perspectives on Homosexuality" by theologian Walter Wink. Walter Wink is also noted for his radical views on pacifism and peacemaking – specifically, Jesus' Third Way as an alternative to either violence or submission.

<http://www.cpt.org/files/BN%20-%20Jesus'%20Third%20Way.pdf>.

According to Dr. Wink, we have had millions of years of practice in defending ourselves from 'biological' threats – animal and human, to which we respond by either fight or flight.

He suggests that Jesus offers us a Third Way.

This 'Third Way' denies worldly powers of their ability to subjugate and humiliate, while bolstering the courage and self-esteem of those who are powerless.

The basis for this theory is derived from Wink's interpretation of a brief passage from the *Sermon on the Mount*, in which he contradicts traditional translations of the Bible, especially, the King James Version.

Willard, p.4

In King James' time,

the only translation in English was The Geneva Bible,
which endorsed 'the right to disobey a tyrant'.

Apparently King James felt that was a little too close to home,
so he commissioned a version that softened Jesus' message.

According to Matthew 5:38-41 in the King James Version...

[38] *Ye have heard that it hath been said,*

An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth:

[39] *But I say unto you,*

That ye resist not evil:

*but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek,
turn to him the other also.*

[40] *And if any man will sue thee at the law,*

and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also.

[41] *And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile,*

go with him twain [meaning 'two miles'].

For example, the admonition not to 'resist' evil is questioned by Walter Wink
who notes the Greek word for 'do not resist'

has a closer meaning of 'do not violently oppose'.

Jesus was against violence – but he was a fighter, too!

Wink says that Jesus 'abhors both passivity and violence'

and that he resisted evil at every turn when he was challenged.

The difference is in challenging evil back without "mirroring" it.

To support his theory, Walter Wink unpacks each of those verses

from the Sermon on the Mount and offers a clever way

to 'resist' without calling down an airstrike of 'fire from heaven'.

Turning the other cheek is not an invitation to be battered,

but forces the assailant to think twice –

exposing the left the side of the face implied one's attacker
would have to strike with a fist, rather than a back hand.

This is significant because, back then, 'only equals fought with fists' –

meaning this would make the slave equal to the master.

This doesn't mean the slave wouldn't still get a beating,

but the subordinate would be making this point to the superior:

'I'm a human being just like you.'

This simple act was a way of turning the tables at a very basic level,

on 'the powers that be'.

Willard, p.5

The other example of surrendering one's 'cloak' – meaning “undergarments”, along with one's 'coat' or “outer garment”, was to provoke shame in the courtroom at seeing nakedness, as well as expose the ridiculous situation of suing poor people for their clothes.

The reference to going a second mile refers to a Roman military edict.

Roman soldiers could compel civilians to carry their pack for one mile only – but any more than that would be breaking regulations.

Carrying the soldier's pack a second mile could put that soldier in trouble.

Again, exaggeration and the absurdity of the situation are brought out – not without the risk of consequences, but having the effect of claiming one's sovereignty to make a choice while putting 'the powers that be' off balance.

Walter Wink says that someone could certainly do such things as a vindictive ploy, but he points out the key attitude that Jesus was stressing was 'love your enemy' – because the whole dynamic, and goal of the Third Way, is to leave the option open for an enemy to be transformed into a friend.

Just as Elisha was determined, in a single-minded fashion, to follow Elijah, and was bold to ask for a double share of his power,

Jesus dared the three would-be disciples to follow him with the same single-minded conviction.

For that was the kind of determination with which Jesus now went forth to confront Jerusalem like an Israelite warrior of old, pressing forward to charge the enemy.

For this, Jesus would ultimately bear the brunt of his enemies' rage, and yet emerge victorious on Resurrection Day.

He has left it to the generations of those who have followed him to carry on the fight.

As we look forward to celebrating Independence Day here in our country, and the Revolution that was fought for our freedom from an Empire, let us remember that it is more than the food, fun, and fireworks of the 4th.

Determination in the fight for justice has seen success and failure this past week as the Supreme Court struck down the federal law, Defense of Marriage Act, which defined marriage as only between a man & a woman, now freeing up same sex couples to receive the same rights as any married couple.

But the Supreme Court also struck down a provision in the Voter Rights Act of 1965 that barred 'preclearance' prerequisites like a literacy test or character reference as a way to exclude minority voters.

Right here in Sumter County and The Villages, the Board of County Commissioners voted to privatize public libraries despite significant public opposition.

Willard, p.6

Let us continue in that struggle to maintain those freedoms without being tricked into copying the violent overreaction of injustice or the negligence of inaction.

God has given us alternatives to the world's 'dog eat dog' Natural Selection, which Walter Wink has described as Jesus' Third Way

reminding us that we are called to stand our ground,
but meet force with ridicule and humor,

expose systemic injustice, break cycles of humiliation,
refuse to submit and accept to inferiority,

be willing to undergo the penalty of breaking unjust laws,
recognizing your own power,

and asserting your own humanity and dignity as a person.

Amen.

Our lesson today from 2 Kings 2:1-2,6-14 tells about how the Prophet Elisha took up the mantle of his mentor, Elijah.

He would go on to establish his own reputation as one of Israel's greatest spiritual leaders.

2:1 Not long before the Lord took Elijah up into heaven in a strong wind, Elijah and Elisha were leaving Gilgal.

2 Elijah said to Elisha,

“The Lord wants me to go to Bethel, but you must stay here.”

Elisha replied,

“I swear by the living Lord and by your own life that I will stay with you no matter what!”

And he went with Elijah to Bethel.

6 Elijah then said to Elisha,

“Now the Lord wants me to go to the Jordan River, but you must stay here.”

Elisha replied,

“I swear by the living Lord and by your own life that I will never leave you!”

So the two of them walked on together.

7 Fifty prophets followed Elijah and Elisha from Jericho,

then stood at a distance and watched as the two men walked toward the river.

8 When they got there, Elijah took off his coat,

then he rolled it up and struck the water with it.

At once a path opened up through the river,

and the two of them walked across on dry ground.

9 After they had reached the other side, Elijah said,

“Elisha, the Lord will soon take me away.

What can I do for you before that happens?”

Elisha answered,

“Please give me twice as much of your power as you give the other prophets, so I can be the one who takes your place as their leader.”

10 “It won't be easy,” Elijah answered.

“It can happen only if you see me as I am being taken away.”

11 Elijah and Elisha were walking along and talking,

when suddenly there appeared between them a flaming chariot pulled by fiery horses.

Right away, a strong wind took Elijah up into heaven.

12 Elisha saw this and shouted,

“Israel's cavalry and chariots have taken my master away!”

After Elijah had gone, Elisha tore his clothes in sorrow.

13 Elijah's coat had fallen off, so Elisha picked it up

and walked back to the Jordan River.

14 He struck the water with the coat and wondered,

“Will the Lord perform miracles for me as he did for Elijah?”

As soon as Elisha did this, a dry path opened up through the water, and he walked across.

Luke 9:51-62

[51] When the days drew near for him to be received up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.

[52] And he sent messengers ahead of him, who went and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him;

[53] but the people would not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem.

[54] And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to bid fire come down from heaven and consume them?"

[55] But he turned and rebuked them.

[56] And they went on to another village.

[57] As they were going along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go."

[58] And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head."

[59] To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father."

[60] But he said to him, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God."

[61] Another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home."

[62] Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

Inspired by Luke 9:51-56

NOW, IT WAS COMING ABOUT

THAT HIS DESTINY WOULD SOON BE FULFILLED:

THAT JESUS WOULD BE TAKEN UP INTO HEAVEN.

THEREFORE, HE WAS DETERMINED TO CONFRONT JERUSALEM.

SO, HE SENT OUT MESSENGERS AHEAD OF HIM

AND THEY DEPARTED TO ENTER A SAMARITAN VILLAGE

IN ORDER TO PREPARE FOR HIM.

HOWEVER, THESE SAMARITANS WERE NOT GOING TO

WELCOME HIM BECAUSE OF HIS PURPOSE:

TO GO TO JERUSALEM.

AND SEEING THIS, THE DISCIPLES JAMES AND JOHN SAID,

“LORD, DO YOU WISH THAT FIRE BE COMMANDED

TO RAIN DOWN AND CONSUME THEM?”

BUT JESUS SPUN AROUND TO ATTACK THEM,

“DON’T YOU KNOW WHAT SORT OF SPIRIT YOU ARE OF?

THE SON OF MAN, THE TRUE HEIR OF HUMANITY

DID NOT COME TO DESTROY, BUT TO SAVE HUMAN LIVES!”

SO, THEY WENT SHEEPISHLY ALONG TO THE NEXT VILLAGE.

AND AS THEY PROCEEDED ON THEIR JOURNEY, SOMEONE SAID TO HIM,

“CAN I COME ALONG WITH YOU WHEREVER YOU GO?”

BUT JESUS SAID TO HIM,

“FOXES HAVE DENS TO LIVE IN

AND THE BIRDS OF THE SKY THEIR NESTS;

YET FOR THE SON OF MAN, THE TRUE HEIR OF HUMANITY,

THERE IS NOT EVEN A BED TO REST.”

HOWEVER, JESUS SAID TO ANOTHER,

“COME ALONG WITH ME!”

AND THIS PERSON SAID,

“LORD, ALLOW ME TO FIRST TO GO AND BURY MY FATHER.”

BUT JESUS SAID,

“SOMETIMES THE DEAD MUST BE ABANDONED

TO BURY THEIR OWN DEAD.

BUT AS FOR YOU, GO BACK;

THEN, PROCLAIM THE BELOVED COMMUNITY OF GOD’S KINGDOM!”

STILL, ANOTHER SAID,

“I WILL FOLLOW YOU, LORD.

BUT FIRST, LET ME SAY GOODBYE TO MY FAMILY.”

AND JESUS SAID TO HIM,

“NO ONE WHO SETS HAND TO PLOW

AND KEEPS LOOKING BACKWARDS

CAN BE A RELIABLE FARMER!

ALLOW YOURSELF TO ALREADY BE IN GOD’S KINGDOM,

THE BELOVED COMMUNITY!”