Spirituality
Pencil Preaching



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“Let the peace of Christ control your hearts” (Colossians 3:13).

Col 3:12-17; Luke 6:27-38

As the nation prepares to commemorate the events of 9-11-2001, it is hard to imagine that any of the speeches or even homilies being prepared for memorial ceremonies will quote today's Gospel reading in which Jesus tells his followers not to respond to evil with evil, but to turn the other cheek, to love your enemies and do good to those who hate you. Radical pacifism has never gone over very well after any conflict has begun, especially one in which great harm has been inflicted on our national pride, interests and lives.

The commemoration offers us a chance to reflect deeply on what Jesus asked of his disciples in their own culture, where honor demanded self-defense and threat of retaliation was presumably to protect you from aggression. How could nonviolent passive resistance be a better path to resolving conflict or effectively responding to violence and injustice?

In fact, with 20 years to examine the outcome of the US response, it might be worth asking how things could have been different. Nobody won, everyone lost. We remember precious lives gone, trillions of dollars spent, tensions worsening in the region and, domestically, the transformation of our own society by surveillance and security concerns that dominate every aspect of our lives. An international police action to bring the actual perpetrators to trial and justice could have showcased one of the principles the United States prizes and avoided two long wars with tens of thousands of civilian casualties, and an early closure on what became a 20-year occupation.

What Jesus proposed to his followers was more wisdom than idealism and as much common sense as radical teaching. Wars of revenge become endless cycles of reprisal that end only in exhaustion or total destruction. Personal quarrels that cannot be resolved lead to a lifetime of resentment and brooding over injury even after the original cause is forgotten. Forgiveness, even if it is unilateral, frees one from the baggage of keeping score and the knots in the lifeline that block love where it is needed elsewhere.

Jesus' radical riff on nonviolence and mercy was really an affirmation of the Golden Rule. He rephrased it in the form of a warning that, as we all know, what goes around comes around: "For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you" (Luke 6:38).

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