Spirituality
Pencil Preaching



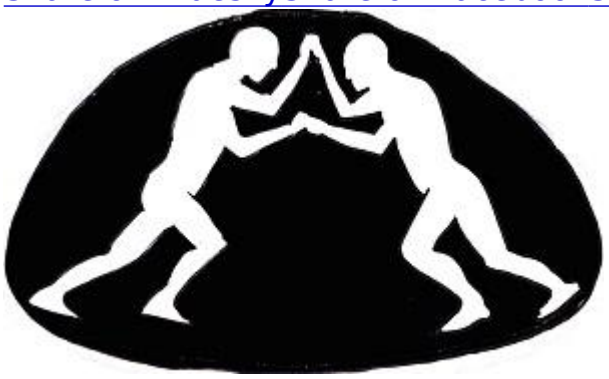
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“Offer no resistance to one who is evil” (Matt 5:38).

2 Cor 6:1-10; Mt 5:38-42

Jesus’ teaching on nonviolence is as radical as it gets when he tells his disciples not to resist those who do evil. In a world in which violence is regarded as the only deterrent to violence, Jesus proposes a strategy that exposes and disarms an aggressor with shame but still leaves the victim vulnerable. It is a gambit that requires a change of heart.

In fact, very few Christians have dared to follow his example. Gandhi, a Hindu, was one of the first to try it in modern times, and he had to expend the full moral force of his personality and his willingness to fast to the point of death to insist that British rule depart India. It was a costly strategy that nearly failed in the partitioning of India that created Muslim Pakistan.

Martin Luther King tried to keep the Civil Rights movement nonviolent in the face of provocation from brutal police tactics and the breakaway Black Power movement. Jesus, Gandhi and King all died for their belief in passive resistance to evil and the power of love to change violent oppressors from within by a fearless witness to the radical superiority of peaceful resolution of conflict over the use of force.

What could justify such a difficult and dangerous strategy? Jesus drew on the deep tradition in Genesis when God rejects vengeance after the murder of Abel by Cain. Jesus knew that human revenge sets in motion a cycle of violence that never ends, and that this was the root of all subsequent violence in history. It has to stop somewhere, and Jesus taught that it stops when one side refuses to do evil for evil.

Jesus explored this strategy in four vivid examples: Turning the other cheek, surrendering your cloak, going the extra mile and being ready to lend when asked. Each occasion illustrated ways people gained power in being made vulnerable. He taught creative ways to break the common patterns of response that would put the burden back on the conscience of the oppressors, forcing them to acknowledge the evil of their actions.

As part of his Sermon on the Mount, nonviolence was the essence of the Beatitudes, a whole new way to move freely and without fear in a world trapped in social evil and abuse. Disciples were to resist this not with evil but with strategic and steadfast love, even for enemies. Martyrdom was sometimes the cost, but the death of an innocent could still break the cycle of strike and revenge.

Many have decided that Jesus' ideal was mere hyperbole, but it is our challenge as disciples to explore and model it as a path that invites us to entrust ourselves to God in a way that is total and irreversible. Laying down your life out of love is still a force more powerful than any weapon or act of aggression.