Opinion
Guest Voices



Singer-songwriter and activist Joan Baez sings a song during the 43nd Annual Kennedy Center Honors at the Kennedy Center on May 21, 2021, in Washington. (AP/Kevin Wolf)



by John Dear

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This week on "The Nonviolent Jesus Podcast," John Dear hosts legendary folk singer Joan Baez, his friend of 35 years.

A lifelong activist for peace, justice, and civil and human rights, Baez has released more than 30 albums and traveled the world singing for peace for more than 60 years. She also published an autobiography called *And a Voice to Sing With*, and recently published her first collection of poems, *When You See My Mother, Ask Her to Dance*.

Baez performed at Woodstock in 1969, was an opening act for Live Aid in 1985, and in 2017 was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. PBS did a biography of her called "How Sweet the Sound," and she was a character in the Bob Dylan biopic "A Complete Unknown," played by actress Monica Barbaro.

She was a close friend of Dr. Martin Luther King. She was arrested for protesting the Vietnam War and performed in Hanoi, Vietnam, amid bombing by U.S. troops.

In the podcast, Baez reveals how her Quaker parents influenced her early childhood and talks about the year she lived in Baghdad. She also speaks about how a meeting with peace activist Ira Sandperl, and later hearing King speak at her high school changed her life forever.

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She is surprisingly candid when it comes to sharing her own failings and how meditation has become a crucial part of her daily routine. When asked about founding the Institute for the Study of Nonviolence in the 1960s, she talks about the one-hour requirement of sitting in silence each morning.

"Many people had their first acquaintance with nonviolence through that experience of silence," she said.

Baez also shares personal anecdotes about Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton, King and her experience with Vaclav Havel and Czechoslovakia's Velvet Revolution. Encouraging all of us to be activists, Baez also reads her 1960s essay, "What Would

You Do If," a dialogue about the threat of personal assault.

At the end of the episode, Baez sings the Civil Rights anthem "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around."

You can listen to the full episode here.

This story appears in the **The Nonviolent Jesus Podcast** feature series. View the full series.