

REFLECTIONS ON AN EAR

I want to reflect for a few minutes on a little incident with an ear. It's in all 4 Gospels, and each one gives a little more detail. In John's Gospel [Jn 18:10-11], read on Good Friday, right after Jesus is arrested in the garden of Gethsemane, Simon Peter cuts off the ear of a slave named Malchus.

In Mark's Passion, which was heard this year on Palm Sunday, [Mk 14:47] it is one of the unnamed bystanders who draws his sword and cuts off the ear of the servant of the High Priest.

In Matthew's account, which was heard on Palm Sunday in 2017, [Mt 26:51-54] Jesus tells the unnamed swordsman to put his sword away, and says that he can call on 12 legions of angels to defend him.

In Luke's version, which will be heard next year on Palm Sunday, [Lk 22:50-51] we discover that it was the right ear & then Jesus heals the servant.

What would be your reaction to the ones who came to arrest Jesus? Or the ones who ended up crucifying him? Would you want to pull out a sword, - or a gun and attack the Temple guards and Roman soldiers? Or maybe to execute Judas?

In each Gospel account, Jesus responded **without violence**, even though he could have wiped out his oppressors without breathing hard. I think I would have wanted to fight. My attitude, at least at first, would be like the dominant attitude of so many in our day - to try to oppose violence with more violence.

That's not new. It was the way of the zealot party in Jesus' day. But when they tried to defeat Rome by violence, thus becoming like their oppressors, their uprising was crushed by the Romans, who destroyed the Jewish Temple.

The attitude that permeates our time and dominates the news cycle is one that believes that violence is the only way to overcome violence. But contemporary attempts to end violence by more violence only lead to a constant cycle of violence.

And they are usually just as effective as one sword cutting off a servant's ear. That was not and is not the attitude of Christ. He revealed his attitude as one of nonviolent opposition to the evil that was in his world.

In John's passion, he is clearly in control, and his calm presence confronts Pilate as Pilate questions him. Jesus' rejection of violence & acceptance of death on a cross was more powerful and successful than any sword, military weapon or nuclear bomb has ever been. The evidence for that is the fact that every year we tell his story once again, entering more and more deeply into the life of the one we are called to follow.

If you want to go deeper into reflecting on Gospel nonviolence, there is an excellent 45 minute youtube video by Walter Wink, "*Nonviolence for the violent*" It can be found at this URL: <https://youtu.be/CQQjE2G25Co>

If we are to call ourselves disciples of Jesus Christ, our attitude must be the attitude that Christ had. It is described in the hymn from the letter of St. Paul to the Philippians:

Your attitude must be that of Christ:

Though he was in the form of God,
Jesus did not deem equality with God something to be grasped at.

Rather, he emptied himself and took the form of a slave,
being born in our likeness.

He was known to be of human estate,
and it was thus that he humbled himself,
obediently accepting even death, death on a cross!

Because of this, God highly exalted him
and bestowed on him the name above every other name.

So that at Jesus' name every knee must bend
in the heavens, on the earth, and under the earth,
and every tongue proclaim to the glory of God the Father:

JESUS CHRIST IS LORD!

[Philippians 2:1-11]

Walter Wink, who died in 2012, wrote 3 seminal books about Gospel Nonviolence: Naming the Powers, 1982; Unmasking the Powers, 1986 and Engaging the Powers, 1992. He died in 2012, but a 25th anniversary edition, summarizing the ideas in his trilogy, was published in 2017. [Engaging the Powers, 25th Anniversary Edition]. His ideas about "The Myth of Redemptive Violence" can be found in an article on the internet in THE BIBLE IN TRANSMISSION, SPRING 1999 www.biblesociety.org.uk/uploads/content/bible_in_transmission/files/1999_spring/Bit_Spring_1999_Wink.pdf

In reading or viewing Walter Wink's books or videos, it is important to understand What a "myth" is. The Merriam-Webster dictionary describes it in this way:

"A myth is a usually traditional story of ostensibly historical events that serves to unfold part of the world view of a people or explain a practice, belief, or natural phenomenon. for example: creation myths."

It is a story that explains reality in a poetic way. It could also be called a "framing story." (The myth of redemptive violence is a deeply ingrained framing story for most of the Western world.)

*A framing story is "a story that gives people direction, values, vision, and inspiration by providing a framework for their lives." It tells people who they are, where they have come from, what they should do, and so on. It frames their lives. The search for a better framing story, he suggests, will allow Christians to discover a fresh vision of Jesus and his message. "Is it possible that at the heart of the life and message of Jesus was an attempt to expose, challenge, confront, transform, and replace the unhealthy framing stories of his day? And could there be a resonance between the unhealthy framing stories of his day and their counterparts in our day?" (cf "The Stories We Tell Ourselves," chapter 9 of *Everything Must Change* by Brian McLaren)*

Tens of thousands have taken the Vow of Nonviolence since it was composed by Eileen Egan and John Dear, S.J. for Pax Christi. It can be pronounced privately, with a local peace community, as part of a parish liturgy, or any other way that suits you. Many profess the Vow each year as part of their New Year observance.

VOW OF NONVIOLENCE

Recognizing the violence in my own heart, yet trusting in the goodness and mercy of God, I vow to practice the nonviolence of Jesus who taught us in the Sermon on the Mount:

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons and daughters of God... You have learned how it was said, 'You must love your neighbor and hate your enemy,' but I say to you, 'Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you. In this way, you will be daughters and sons of your Creator in heaven."

- by striving for peace within myself and seeking to be a peacemaker in my daily life;
- by refusing to retaliate in the face of provocation and violence; by persevering in nonviolence of tongue and heart;
- by living conscientiously and simply so that I do not deprive others of the means to live;
- by actively resisting evil and working nonviolently to abolish war and the causes of war from my own heart and from the face of the earth.

God, I trust in Your sustaining love and believe that just as You gave me the grace and desire to offer this, so You will also bestow abundant grace to fulfill it. Amen.

[Pax Christi]