

Non-Violence (Part Two)

“Blessed are the peacemakers”

Reflection 58 in the series “A New World in the Morning”

We all know that violence can be monstrous and that curbing it is not easy. There is out in the western hills of Jerusalem a Holocaust memorial called Yad Vashem. It pays stark simple tribute to the six million Jews who died in the Nazi holocaust before the watching eyes of a “Christian” world. In its museum are the pictures. Pictures of the silent, naked dying, defiled and dehumanized. Pictures of burning synagogues. Pictures of pits filled with corpses. Pictures of the walking dead trapped in ghettos. And there are the stories – told in the words of those who survived and those that didn’t. On the floor of the windowless Tent of Remembrance, lit by an eternal flame, are inlaid the names of the death camps: Sobibor ... Chelmno ... Treblinka ... Dachau ... Theresienstadt ... Birkenau ... Auschwitz ... and more.

I never forget the last time I saw Yad Vashem. That same afternoon those I was traveling with drove out to Bethlehem, and out in what are called the Shepherds’ Fields, we read Luke’s account of the birth of Jesus. And the awful truth hit home that what happened at Bethlehem over 2000 years ago happened so that there would be no more Yad Vashems, no more need for such memorials, no more holocausts, no more massacres. And as I stood looking out over the fields of Bethlehem, I wondered: Why was Jesus not heard? Not followed? Not taken seriously? What has gone wrong? It was all so simple. Why was he not heard? Whatever happened to “Blessed are the peacemakers”? Whatever happened to, “All who draw the sword will die by the sword”? Why have we not invested in peace, invested our time, talent and money in peace, invested our ingenuity and creativity in peace, as much as we have in war? Why have we not insisted on our nation doing this? Why have we not personally done this? Why should we expect the cost of peace to be any less than the cost of war? What would happen if we were to “wage peace” with the discipline, training, forethought, preparation, mobilization, sacrifice, and willingness to suffer that so many have accepted to wage war?

We’re not talking here of pacifism; we’re talking about peacemaking. Pacifists are mostly known for what they won’t do. Peacemakers distinguish themselves by what they will do: the imagination it takes to find nonviolent solutions to conflict, the discipline it takes to listen to and sort out the perceived grievances of your adversary, the integrity it takes to admit your own part in the conflict, the hard work it takes to care about your enemy’s security and well-being as well as your own, the willingness to suffer casualties just as soldiers do. But if we could do it! Imagine. There was a time when no one could imagine life without slavery. Not really so very long ago. Imagine a world without war. Imagine a new world in the morning. Is it really so unthinkable, or is it largely a lack of imagination and discipline?

Such a future depends on the way of Jesus, the way of the Cross. There must be on earth a new people redeemed and transformed, skilled in the arts of trust and forgiveness, a new humanity, a worldwide movement, a global network devoted to peace, that does not give in to fear, that trusts God and the future God gives us, so that beside every network

of violence there is a network of love undermining, and if necessary absorbing, the hatred and the fear. Such people will be recognized as the people of God.

The challenge then is to commit ourselves once again to hearing Jesus, to really hearing Jesus. We all have someone whose voice we listen to most. Is it Jesus? But it's hard to start with the seventh beatitude if you've skipped the sixth. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." It starts with putting God back in the center of our thinking, no one else, nothing else. The eternal call is to encounter this God, to acquire this amazing God-consciousness, emptying ourselves so that we might be filled with God, stretching outward from our narrow, little selves, expanding into all that is, so that streams of living water might flow from within us bringing peace everywhere. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. And in the creative, courageous, faith-filled pursuit of this, we will create for ourselves and for others a new world in the morning.

– Dale Pauls