

Pastor Jon Mark
Holy Tuesday
March 30, 2021

Meditation

One of the most transformational books that I have read on how to be a Christian was called, “tattoos on the heart.” This book was written by a catholic priest, Father Gregory Boyle, in a violent neighborhood of LA. He started a ministry where he gave former gang members, called Homeboy Industries, where these young men and women could get out of the cycle of violence, where they did not expect to live past 20. He has had to bury too many young people, people he tried to save, and even people who successfully got out. There is a story of a young man who had moved away into a nice apartment with his wife and small child, he was building a clean life for himself, but he returned to his home neighborhood to visit family and a member of a rival gang recognized him and shot him. After this heart-wrenching story Father Boyle says that if he judged his ministry based on results he would consider himself a failure and would quit. Instead, he measures himself based on faithfulness, based on the patient, tenacious faithfulness that comes from doing what we think God wants him to do.

Isaiah’s suffering servant does not grow faint or will be crushed. He will establish justice in the earth. Opening the sight of the blind, releasing prisoners who wait in darkness. Again like yesterday I repeat that we do not know who the servant of this poem is. Christians identify it with Jesus because Jesus is also in the ministry of restoring sight and releasing prisoners. Jesus also came with a nonviolent ministry, though I do like to imagine he yelled at the religious establishment of his day. Still, that is a personal head-canon. Nevertheless, this passage also belongs to Isaiah and its original audience, which are currently crying out for justice in the midst of their exile. In these hard times, they needed to know what true leadership would look like, what faithfulness would look like, and Isaiah is ready to provide.

The suffering servant of Isaiah 49, shows us that how faithfulness is not always about results, but also about how you do it. Faithfulness is the walk toward a destination, but not the destination itself. Or if you want a modern saying, the ends do not justify the means. Here the servant is establishing justice, yes, but it is how they do it that intrigues me.

He will not cry or lift up his voice,
or make it heard in the street;
a bruised reed he will not break,
and a dimly burning wick he will not quench;
he will faithfully bring forth justice.

God has given you as a covenant to the people,
a light to the nations,

It is about covenant, it is about whether the servant raises their voice, it’s about the nonviolence of not breaking a fragile reed or a dimly burning wick.

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So how are we to respond to this call to a faithful life walk. The textbook Mennonite answer is to re-affirm our nonviolent ethic and talk about how we will continue to be a model community teaching others how to live through the example of our lives. And yes, this is important. As I spoke about yesterday, our nonviolent message is very important and we should continue to deepen this message so that our definition of violence is expanded beyond just the military, but also to violence that the state does against its own citizens through our police and judicial system, the interpersonal violence that continues in homes across this country and in this city. But also the violence of emotional damage when we leave lasting scars that do not show up in the ER. And the violence of economic violence from our selfishness, the culture of self-reliance and demonizing the poor. The health violence of medical care only for those with enough money to pay for it and environmental racism that places certain communities in polluted areas. I could go on and on, but I hope that this can help us dive deeper into just how complex and deep our ethic of nonviolence could run, if we chose to embrace this challenge to walk a faithful life toward justice.

But again, let me give you one concrete goal. I want to know what each of you is willing to commit to and we can type it in the chat during easter worship. This could be something that comes out of my sermon today, the ritual of remembering our baptism later on, or maybe just something else that you have committed yourself to. I don't want to know that you are working to idk, working on anti-racism. I want to know an action, a commitment that you think is part of the faithful Christian walk, better yet to name something you are already doing. It could be as simple as faithfully playing music that enlivens our souls. Or faithfully maintaining relationships with people. I hope you can write something down this week to prepare for worship on Sunday or better yet, send it to me and I will put it up on the screen with or without your name.

Let us faithfully bring forth justice this week.