

The Reverend Jon Hauerwas - September 29, 2019 - In Peace
Isaiah 9:2, 6-7 and Isaiah 11:1-2, 5-9

In today's diverse, global landscape, half of the world's population now adheres to a faith other than Christianity or to no faith at all. We find represented both near and far the full spectrum of religious traditions. If we are to have peace, then it is to be a global enterprise and a universal desire.

In the United States, we often take peace for granted. We know that many had their lives shattered by the bombings of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Still others experienced the horrors of September 11, 2001. And yet, these examples of attacks on U.S. soil are exceptions rather than the rule. In modern times, Americans have typically waged armed conflicts in distant lands. Thus, despite being a nation engaged in seemingly perpetual war, with soldiers stationed across the globe, our citizens are not acquainted with foreign boots at home.

Daily, we entrust our safety to a myriad of professionals in the intelligence community, in the armed forces, and in thousands of police departments across this country. And yet, because we struggle to make peace, violence abounds. How often it is that we hear of another mass shooting. Of another disgruntled employee. Another troubled student. Another religious zealot or white nationalist. Another

jealous ex. Another drug-related turf war waged in the streets. Another life senselessly taken. And in an age when many ask if scripture's ancient teachings remain relevant, the guidance found within them continues to change the world.

Just consider, for example, that Mahatma Gandhi “read from the Sermon on the Mount nearly every morning and evening for over forty years.” “Although he wasn't a Christian, he decided early on to live his life according to Jesus' teachings” found there. ¹ “As he wrote in his autobiography, the first time he read” Jesus' sermon, “probably in the 1890s in Durban, South Africa,” the words went, quote, “‘straight to my heart.’ Such teachings as ‘offer no violent resistance to evil; turn the other cheek; and if [anyone] takes away your coat, give [them] your cloak as well... delighted me beyond measure.’” ²

“‘When I came to the New Testament,’ Gandhi continued , ‘and the Sermon on the Mount, I began to understand the Christian teaching. The teaching echoed something I had learned in childhood and something which seemed to be part of my being and which I felt was being acted [out] in the daily life around me.’” ³ “‘I saw

¹ Mahatma Gandhi, *An Autobiography, or The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, trans. Mahadev Desai (Navajivan Publishing House: 1996, ©1927), 58. See Gandhi on Christianity, ed. Robert Ellsberg (Orbis Books: 1991), 5.

² Gandhi, *Autobiography*, 5.

³ Mahatma Gandhi, “The Jesus I Love,” *Young India*, vol. 13, no. 53 (December 31, 1931), 429. See Ellsberg 21.

that the Sermon on the Mount was the whole of Christianity for [those] who wanted to live a Christian life.” And “it is that Sermon which has endeared Jesus to me.”⁴ “The gentle figure of Christ, so patient, so kind, so loving, so full of forgiveness that he taught His followers not to retaliate when abused or struck, but to turn the other cheek—I thought it was a beautiful example of the perfect [human being].”⁵

Friends, “there is no indication that the rigorous demands of the Sermon on the Mount were meant only as some unrealizable ideal.”⁶ Jesus didn’t merely teach these words. He embodied them, thus reminding us that “we are not to accept the world with its hate and resentments as a given, but to recognize that we live in a new age which makes possible a new way of life.”⁷

Yes. If we want peace in our world and our nation, peace in our cities and between neighbors, then there must be peace in our homes and peace in our hearts. We may recall the words of Rodney King who famously asked, “why can’t we all just get along?” And yet we know, as did he, that peace does not come so easily. Thus, while we nod our heads in agreement with the morality espoused by Jesus, Gandhi, and countless other figures known only in small communities around the

⁴ Gandhi Jesus, 22.

⁵ Mille Graham Polak, *Mr. Gandhi: The Man* (George Allen and Unwin Ltd.: 1931), 40. See Ellsberg, 12.

⁶ Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics*, (University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame: 2002), 85.

⁷ Hauerwas, 85.

world, we recognize that we still have work to do. Work to get from where we are right now - here, in this place - to where they were and are, observing a posture of lifelong receptivity.

But being receptive is about more than knowledge and opening one's self to new ideas. It's about cultivating emotional intelligence, as well. When Gandhi wrote that Jesus' sermon "went straight to my heart" and "delighted me beyond measure," he was reminding us that "emotions shape how we perceive the world. Fear," for example, "finds the world filled with threat; depression overlooks the good things in life; bliss neglects the storm clouds on the horizon."⁸

If we are to become people of character, then we are wise to focus on emotional learning, and to recognize that "how [one] perceives the world is critical to how he or she lives and acts."⁹ "Jesus," our guide, "is the epitome of nonviolence. . . . He forms his community of disciples to practice his way of nonviolence, and he sends them out as 'sheep into the midst of wolves' [Matthew 10:16] to announce God's reign of peace."¹⁰

⁸ William P. Brown, *Wisdom's Wonder: Character, Creation, and Crisis in the Bible's Wisdom Literature*, (William B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids: 2014), 10.

⁹ Brown, 16.

¹⁰ Richard Rohr, online devotional.

“When Jesus’ own grassroots campaign of nonviolence reaches Jerusalem, he engages in nonviolent civil disobedience in the Temple, is arrested, tortured, and executed, and yet remains perfectly nonviolent unto his last breath. Even in his resurrection, Jesus practices nonviolence. He does not utter a word of revenge, anger, or retaliation. Instead, he makes breakfast for those who once abandoned him [John 21:9] and gives them his resurrection gift of peace.”¹¹

In considering his example, we understand that “living a life of forgiveness and peace is not an impossible ideal but an opportunity now present.”¹² Walking in his ways and committing himself daily to the work of nonviolence, Gandhi “helped liberate both South Africa and India from systemic violence and showed the world the power of active nonviolence. In the process, Gandhi, a Hindu, became a Christ-like figure, ‘the greatest Christian of modern times,’ according to Martin Luther King, Jr.”¹³

It is no surprise that we all long for peace. Peace in our hearts. Peace in our homes. Peace in our neighborhoods. Peace in our cities. Peace in our nation. Peace in our world. So may it come quickly, and may it begin in us. Amen.

¹¹ Rohr.

¹² Hauerwas, 85.

¹³ Rohr.