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July 6, 2025

Scripture: Luke 22: 35-53

Sermon Title: Healing and Nonviolence

Prayer...

Introduction:

Last month I completed my final presbytery meeting as the Moderator of our Cascades Presbytery. Our presbytery includes 85 churches and 10 other smaller worshipping communities that are kind of like church plants. My job this last year was to lead four separate meetings that included representatives from these churches, two meetings in person and two online. As Moderator I guided the conversations, helped facilitate the votes on various motions that helped influence the mission of our presbytery. I also occasionally spoke words of encouragement about our mission and offered prayers to God on behalf of the body. The word moderator is similar to the word moderate. The goal of a moderator is to be a peacemaker who is calm and strong and balanced, while others at times might be more intense. The job of the moderator is to make sure decorum is kept in meetings and to move the meetings along in a timely way.

It was a good way for me to volunteer for our presbytery this last year, but I have to say I am relieved to finish in this role because a moderator at times faces conflict and I prefer to not experience conflict often. I realize being a Moderator was good for me and my leadership development, but it was hard in some ways.

I have to say though that I understand more now than ever that my calling is to be a peacemaker. I am somehow wired to love everybody, really the whole world, and to somehow help build bridges and cultivate peace wherever I go. I think Jesus was the best peacemaker in history and I think we should all follow his example.

This morning I want to explore a story of healing that shows Jesus' heart for peace and nonviolence.

(Summarize Story)

A couple things to notice in this story. First I want to highlight that the story of Jesus being arrested in the garden is in all four of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John). This means it was a well known story in the early church. It is included for a reason. In all four stories, a sword is used by a disciple to cut off the ear of a man. Luke's gospel is the only one that includes the story of Jesus healing the man who had his ear cut off. Lish and I were discussing this truth this week and Lish wondered if Luke might include the healing because of his interest in healing, since he was a physician. I think that is likely true, since Luke is known for his healing stories and his heart for the poor. In John's gospel, the name of the person with the sword is given as the disciple Peter and the person whose ear is cut off is Malchus, who is the slave of the High priest. I think Malchus is named possibly in John's Gospel because church tradition might assume that Malchus later became a follower of Jesus. I think it is likely that if your ear is healed in that way, you might follow Jesus too. When we learn that Peter used the sword, we can know that John's gospel is highlighting again that Peter struggled with his own tendencies toward violence, but later was restored by Jesus and his grace.

What I love about this story of Jesus healing the man who is struck with a sword is that it symbolizes to me the way of Jesus as love and nonviolence. Jesus says in this story after the sword is used, "No more of this." And then Jesus heals the man. Jesus tells the ones arresting him. "Have you come out with swords and clubs as if I were a bandit. When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness." Jesus in another gospel shares that he could call on a legion of angels to help him, but instead he willingly to submits to the arrest.

Judas betrays Jesus with a kiss during this story and Jesus in Matthew's gospel calls Judas friend. The power of Jesus in this story is not in his rebellion but in

his non-violence. He chooses the way of peace and love and sacrifices his life for us.

I know this feels somehow wrong. Part of me wants Jesus to do what we normally see in the movies. We want Jesus to do some cool action moves that leave all those arresting him on the ground, while he escapes, but that does not happen in this case. (Mission Impossible style action moves).

Instead he heals a man and calls his betrayer friend.

Friends, the way of Jesus is nonviolent. The disciples have two swords. Jesus had even told them to bring those swords, according to Luke's Gospel. Some argue that appearance of the swords in this story and an earlier story where Jesus turns over the money changer tables in the temple shows that Jesus is willing to use violence at times, but in terms of what Jesus actually did on earth, there is very little evidence to suggest that Jesus advocated for violence. I wonder sometimes if Jesus was tempted to use violence. Maybe asking the disciples to bring swords was Jesus getting confused temporarily. Maybe he was tempted, but when the time comes to possibly use the swords, Jesus chooses to heal not kill. Jesus taught love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. Jesus forgave his oppressors and loved all until the end of his life. When he rose, he kept loving all while calling us to the purpose of peace, shalom, wholeness, health, compassion, and grace.

As I have shared with you before I am a child of the 1970's. I was born in 1971. When I was a teenager in the 1980's a lot of the rock stars of the 1960's became popular again and kept performing their hits. The Monkeys, one of the bands of the 60's had a resurgence. So did the Beach Boys. My sister became a fan of the Beatles and had a book full of Beatles history. We started listening to all the Beatles music. When I was 14, I went on an East Coast Study tour and explored many famous historical sites in places like Boston and New York City. I remember going to Central Park and seeing a plaque on the ground with the word IMAGINE. It was a tribute to John Lennon of the Beatles, who lived near Central Park with his wife Yoko and son Juliann, when John was killed in 1980.

John Lennon, as we all know was an incredible artist. Many disagreed with some of his philosophies. He was not a fan of organized religion. What I appreciate about Lennon's famous song imagine is the lyrics about peace.

Let me sing a short portion of the song to you...

Imagine all the people

Living life in peace

You

You may say that I am a dreamer

But I am not the only one.

I hope one day you will join us.

And the world will be as one.

I wonder if John Lennon and Jesus have something in common.

Both of them are dreamers and both of them put forth an ideal for people to consider of love for everyone.

Both talked about peace and imagining a world of nonviolence where people were not divided by country, culture, or beliefs.

On this 4th of July weekend, we

are celebrating our nation. I think it is okay to be patriotic and to love your country as long as we don't fall into a belief that God wants to bless people in the United States of America anymore than anyone else in the world. God want to bless the world with peace and to have us join with the whole human race and all of creation in one humble adoration of God and one celebration of the gift of all people and cultures everywhere. I hope one day more Christians will not only invite people to join our religion but will also partner with people of other religions to work for peace. In fact Buddhism and the Bahai faith have a lot to teach Christians about peacemaking and non-violence, just to name two other faiths that we might learn from.

What if as followers of Jesus we took a more humble and non-violent approach to the world around us and what if we chose to represent a God to the world that was inherently loving and non-violent. What if we really embraced Jesus, who is the non-violent representation of God.

It may be interesting to know that most scholars of history agree that the early Christians were largely pacifists. Many of the early church fathers, forbid killing and although some Christians served in the military, it was also common for people to choose not to serve in that way. Throughout Christian history, we have movements of Christians that chose non-violence as a strong conviction. Quakers and Mennonites come to mind as two denominations with this value.

Growing up Presbyterian, I found a mix of perspectives on war and non-violence. What I have come to believe for myself is that it is important in our imperfect world where evil and violence exist to have an existing military and police officers. I believe also in self defense. I am a pretty practical person and there are times I think when reluctantly some form of violence may be used to protect innocent people or maybe to free someone from being captive. I do believe that.

But I also believe that the larger goal of peace requires us to maintain an ideal that is reflected in the non-violent image of Jesus. Ultimately, I trust that our Sovereign God will find a way to take care of this world. I am very cautious about those that see war and violence as a positive means of bringing healing to the world. Love is the source of healing and the value of non-violence is an important contribution in the conversation that leads to diplomacy and peacemaking. We can learn from Gandhi, Howard Thurman, Martin Luther King Jr., and others about the importance of non-violence and peaceful protest to bring about change.

What makes Jesus' life of peace so powerful and his choice to heal rather than fight so meaningful is that it feels counter-cultural. This morning it might be easy as we explore this idea to fall into a perspective of do I agree that love

and non-violence are the only means for peace. You might become analytical and wrestle with whether God is non-violent in nature or not.

That's fine, but I would rather you let go of your intellectual wrestling and instead be inspired by the surprising story of God who became human in Jesus and chose the way of non-violence to bring about resurrection and the gift of shalom for the world. We need to dream like the artists and hope for a world of peace and wholeness even when it seems too hard to believe it is possible. We need dreamers like Jesus, John Lennon, you, and me to make a difference in this world and in this nation.

You may ask, why is it important that God is inherently nonviolent in nature. After all, God is God and can be whoever God wants to be. The reason God must be nonviolent in nature is because God is love and God is the ideal that humanity must strive to embody in this world. If God quickly stoops to the violence that we as humans so easily fall into, then God is not love. I choose to believe that God is revealed in Jesus and is therefore not at all prone to violence. God is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. If violence is ever done by God, it must be done reluctantly and only as a means of protection of the vulnerable. I realize I am not God, but my desire to worship a God who is nonviolent in nature is because only a God of love is worth following and only a God of love would be consistent with our Savior the Lord Jesus Christ. Please pray with me...

Luke 22: 35-43

35 He said to them, “When I sent you out without a purse, bag, or sandals, did you lack anything?” They said, “No, not a thing.” 36 He said to them, “But now, the one who has a purse must take it, and likewise a bag. And the one who has no sword must sell his cloak and buy one. 37 For I tell you, this scripture must be fulfilled in me, ‘And he was counted among the lawless,’ and indeed what is written about me is being fulfilled.” 38 They said, “Lord, look, here are two swords.” He replied, “It is enough.”

Jesus Prays on the Mount of Olives

39 He came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him. 40 When he reached the place, he said to them, “Pray that you may not come into the time of trial.”[g] 41 Then he withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, knelt down, and prayed, 42 “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me, yet not my will but yours be done.” [[43 Then

an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength. 44 In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground.]]][h] 45 When he got up from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping because of grief, 46 and he said to them, “Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not come into the time of trial.”[i]

The Betrayal and Arrest of Jesus

47 While he was still speaking, suddenly a crowd came, and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him, 48 but Jesus said to him, “Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?” 49 When those who were around him saw what was coming, they asked, “Lord, should we strike with the sword?” 50 Then one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. 51 But Jesus said, “No more of this!” And he touched his ear and healed him. 52 Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple police, and the elders who had come for him, “Have you come out with swords and clubs as though I were a rebel? 53 When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour and the power of darkness!