

Matthew 7:12-14

¹² 'In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.

¹³ 'Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. ¹⁴For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

Romans 12:9-21

⁹ Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; ¹⁰love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. ¹¹Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. ¹²Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. ¹³Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. ¹⁶Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. ¹⁷Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. ¹⁸If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.' ²⁰No, 'if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.' ²¹Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

I was surprised to read that Mahatma Gandhi – the person whom helped liberate a whole nation through strategic non-violence; the one from whom Martin Luther King, Jr. learned the tactics of nonviolent direct

action – that same Gandhi once said, “if the only two choices are to kill or stand quietly by doing nothing while the weak are oppressed and killed, then, of course, we must kill.”

John D. Roth, Goshen College professor & author, shares an experience of riding a subway one evening in Germany where he was lecturing.¹ There was a man who looked impoverished (perhaps homeless) riding in the same car as him, at one stop some young men got on and soon started harassing this homeless-looking man. John could tell that it was escalating. The man being harassed was alone –looking overwhelmed, he was vulnerable and in increasing danger. John stood up from his place in the subway car and moved toward the intensifying situation, and in his best German said, “Fritz, Fritz my old friend – I didn’t recognize you. It has been so long since I have seen you.” And John went and put his arm around the homeless looking man and continued talking to him in this familiar tone, as if he was a long lost friend. The young men who had been harassing “Fritz” now left him alone, and soon got off the train. Perhaps in John’s action they saw the humanity of this man, despite his appearance. Or, perhaps it was simply the reality that they knew someone else was paying attention – someone who might alert the authorities (or be believed by the authorities). Of course the man’s name wasn’t Fritz, and he and John had never met. In that escalating situation of tension and harassment, it was the creative and nonviolent action that came to John’s mind.

“If the only two choices are to kill or stand quietly by doing nothing while the weak are oppressed and killed, then, of course, we must kill.” But there are never just two options. There is always a third option. Nonviolent direct action. We call this the “Third Way of Jesus.” Between doing nothing and using violence; between allowing the vulnerable to be oppressed and taking up weapons to bring about violent revolution – stands the third way of Jesus. The way of active nonviolence. The way of directly working for justice, peace and a more loving world.

¹ I heard John D. Roth tell this story in a class I took with him at Goshen College. I believe he also tells it in his book, *Choosing Against War*.

We know that in 5,000 years of recorded human history there are more than 14,000 recorded wars. We know that on average, a peace treaty is broken in an average of two years. And we know that the United States has enough weapons to kill the entire world at least 12 times².

But we also know that peace is not just the absence of war; peace is not just the absence of physical violence. Peace is the fullness of justice; peace is things being in right relationship. Peace is all having enough. So too, for us to be peacemakers means more than simply refusing to fight – it is not just refusing to solving our differences without violence. Being peacemakers means that we take that narrow path that leads to life, the path of non-violent action. Being peacemakers means that we chose the third way of Jesus.

Lisa Schirch, who works for peace around our globe, does not believe that Jesus' instructions to us to "love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us" are simply a good personal philosophy – she believes they are strategic. She calls the way of enemy love "God's security strategy." She believes that these words of Jesus are not just ethical, *they are strategic*³.

Schirch has spent years working with Israelis and Palestinians, listening to and learning from those who are working for peace on the ground in this region of perpetual conflict. She has concluded that many of our tactics for peace, they actually make groups more 'right wing' or more closed in as a group. Schirch says that according to studies done at Harvard, the thing that

² These statistics come from Steve Nolt's course, War, Peace, and Nonresistance at Goshen College.

³ Lisa Schirch makes this claim during her interview on the podcast Peace Lab, <https://www.stitcher.com/podcast/the-peace-lab/e/54652782?autoplay=true>

gets Israelis to change their minds about Palestinians the most is sitting down and listening to them. Once people feel heard, they are better able to sort out particular pieces – to perhaps sort out some of the actions of their government from their Jewish practices and religious beliefs. When all we are doing is denouncing and demonizing people and saying, “no, no, no”, it has the wrong effect – it makes people feel alone, it solidifies people in their position, it cements them into their particular group and “group think” even more. It works to polarize the situation.⁴

Her work, in Israel-Palestine, with the United States military, and with victims of trauma – this work has lead her to the conclusion that in order to come to a resolution the *most quickly*, we must concern ourselves with listening – we must concern ourselves with understanding – we must concern ourselves with coalition building of people with whom we both agree and disagree. We must listen to those with whom we disagree. We must come to know our enemy. This, she says, is not just the right thing to do, but the strategic thing to do, in order to end injustice most quickly.

This is a message she tells the US military about Al-Qaeda and the Taliban, that instead of bombing them and threatening them and demonizing them, we have to do more understanding and listening to the grievances that these groups have. This is the fastest way to lessen conflict – it is the fastest way to peace.

Thich Nhat Hahn, the great Buddhist teacher, says something quite similar – he says that if we want peace, we have to help our enemy not live in fear. “If the United States wants safety,

⁴ This also comes from her interview on Peace Lab.

it has to take care of the safety of other nations also.”⁵ We can only have safety from terrorism if people elsewhere are feeling safe as well.

I think one of the flaws of my own theology of nonviolence is that I don't expect anyone to really take me seriously. That is the truth. I have been taught an ethic of Biblical non-violence that, at its core says, “we are called to be faithful, not to be effective.” You have hopefully heard me say this more than a few times from this pulpit, that our calling is to attend to the work God has given us to do and not worry about the results. We do our work in love, but we do not control the outcome. We are called to be faithful to the ways of Jesus Christ, not to be effective.

And I believe that fully. But the shadow side of that teaching is that we can forget that non-violence is effective. I have never really thought that “loving our enemies” may in fact be God's security strategy. That if we were using the tactics of Jesus, the Department of Homeland Security would be filled with people doing education and economic development around the world – it would be full of people listening and learning to those who see us as their enemy. That this may actually be the fastest way to peace – not just the best way, not just the Jesus way, but the fastest way! Enemy Love is God's security strategy. I have missed this. “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.” This is not just a nice little philosophy that exists, in some form in most every major world religion, it is a strategy for peace. It is God's strategy for peace.

⁵ Thich Nhat Hahn, in his book *Fear: Essential Wisdom for Getting Through the Storm*

In John chapter 8, while Jesus is teaching, a woman is brought to Jesus who has been caught breaking the religious law – she has accused of adultery. Jesus, as the story goes, bends down and writes something in the dirt. Perhaps he is taking time to gather himself, or perhaps this is his strategy, to take a moment to disarm the situation. He then famously says, “Let those of you who are without sin throw the first stone.” He does not call them misogynists. He does not attack their biblical interpretation. He does not post on social media how stupid they are. He helps these men see themselves in the woman they are accusing – he helps them see how much they are like this woman whom they want to make an example of, whom they want to stone.

There are many ways we think of this story, but how often do we think of it as part of Jesus’ strategy of peace – Jesus’ action help those religious leaders to see themselves in this woman. By doing so, he brings transformation. He directly and non-violently resolves a potentially lethal situation.

Throughout the Gospels we see Jesus employing this strategy of peace – just one small example of Jesus’ third way – between allowing the status quo (doing nothing) & using violence stands the way of Jesus – this is the way of nonviolent action – this is the way of creative peacemaking.

Lisa Schirch lays out ten Strategies for peacemakers (which I will pass out to you at the end of the sermon).⁶ The first of these strategies is what she calls, **a two-handed approach to peacebuilding:**

⁶ The full list of these can be found at <https://lisaschirch.wordpress.com/2018/05/17/10-ethics-of-peacebuilding/>

That with one hand we reach out to our enemy (to those with whom we are in conflict) and we affirm their humanity. And with the other hand, we push for justice and speak truth as diplomatically we can.

That with this hand (pushing hand) we name things that need to be named, we try to be prophetic – we stand for and with the weak and oppressed.

And with this hand we listen to and learn from the other. In doing so, we know that we will be changed. She says that “when I talk with my enemy, or someone that I disagree with, I will be changed in this endeavor.” I will learn something. It helps me humanize them. And it can help in work of the other hand – it can help me to better craft my argument or tactics, it can help me see what needs to be addressed in myself or in my own position.

I know that some of you have read an article floating around Facebook by the Rabbi of Congregation Sha'ar Zahav in San Francisco⁷. In response to the shooting at The Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburg, Congregation Sha'ar Zahav, like many other synagogues around the country, was asking questions about security. Their rabbi wrote, “My chief hope since the shooting has been that we will refuse to live in fear...Sometimes” she continues “we do have legitimate reasons to be scared. The key is that even when there is cause to be afraid, we refuse to be overcome by it.”

⁷ The full article can be found at <https://www.jweekly.com/2018/11/09/at-my-synagogue-ill-take-20-mennonites-over-one-armed-guard/?fbclid=IwAR2Edyn7NJoKMHA4ABjQDKkFdkLIXe6vp1Gz8yqoakK6Ew6kYnjhPPvGQRl>

And so their security strategy thus far has not been to hire an armed security guard, but to have twenty people from First Mennonite Church of San Francisco, with whom they share the building where they worship – that during the past two weeks of services, people from First Mennonite in San Francisco have formed an arc at the entrance of the synagogue and sung hymns while their Jewish sisters and brothers worshipped.

Of this, the rabbi says, that “Perhaps our community will decide that we do need to step up security measures in some way down the line. But in the short term, I’ll take 20 Mennonites over one armed security guard any day.”

This, I believe, is an example of Jesus’ third way. To stand-up for our sisters and brothers, to stand with them and be the security. But, the beauty of this story of peacemaking is not that it makes Mennonites look good (which, we all love stories that make us look good). This act of peacemaking didn’t just start after the shooting in Pittsburg, the act of peacemaking started about 15 years ago when this Jewish community decided to welcome a group of Mennonites to share their worship space. The peacemaking began when a Jewish group was able to open up their building to a group of Christians – a people group who have historically persecuted and marginalized their people; they opened up their sacred space to Christians, despite the fact that they have experienced centuries of persecution, ridicule and rejection at the hands of Christians (Mennonites among them). This was not an easy decision for the synagogue to make, to allow their holy space to be used by a Christian group. But with the hand of peacemaking, they reached out and invited First Mennonite in. And that relationship has been building since that time. This is where peacemaking began – here, Congregation Sha’ar Zahav was a shining example of the Third Way of Jesus.

We must never be impartial when it comes to injustice. “If the only two choices are to kill or stand quietly by doing nothing while the weak are oppressed and killed, then, of course, we must kill.” But there are never only two options. There is always a third option – the way of Jesus, the way of direct non-violent action. May we be a people of this hard and narrow way, for it is the way of life – the quickest way to justice and lasting peace. Amen.