

*Cross Purposes*  
Series: Seek Peace and Pursue It  
Isaiah 53:3-9; John 18:33-38a; 1 Peter 2:20-23  
Sermon by Richard Kauffman  
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Isaiah 53:3-9:

*3He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account.*

*4Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. 5But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. 6All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. 7He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. 8By a perversion of justice he was taken away. Who could have imagined his future? For he was cut off from the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people. 9They made his grave with the wicked and his tomb with the rich, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.*

John 18:33-38a:

*33Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” 34Jesus answered, “Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?” 35Pilate replied, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?” 36Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.” 37Pilate asked him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” 38Pilate asked him, “What is truth?” After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, “I find no case against him.”*

1 Peter 2:20-23:

*20If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, what credit is that? But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God’s approval. 21For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps. 22“He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.” 23When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly.*

Where were you on the morning of 9/11—that is, if you were born and are old enough to remember?

I was pastoring the Toledo Mennonite Church at the time. That morning I was in a pastors’ meeting at a restaurant on the edge of Pettisville, OH. One of the owners interrupted our meeting to tell us a plane had hit one of the Twin Towers. We didn’t think much of it. Then she came back later and said the other Tower had been hit by a plane. Then we knew something big was up and we disbanded our meeting. I went home and pretty much sat in front of the TV the rest of the day.

Two mornings later I got a call from Roberta DeBoer, columnist for the *Toledo Blade*, the primary Toledo newspaper. She was disturbed about all the revenge talk she was hearing in response to the terrorist attack. She thought a Mennonite pastor might have an alternative perspective. She wanted to know what I thought. I told her:

- Just because I'm a Christian pacifist doesn't mean I don't have feelings of anger toward the terrorists who did this. After all, I'm human too.
- I thought it was wrong to declare a war on terrorism. We cannot predict what such a war would unleash (now we know—almost unending war and unrest in the Middle East). Besides, this outrageous deed should be treated more like a crime. The people who were behind this should be found and tried in a court of law for their crime.
- My commitment to Jesus' way of peace was based on Jesus' willingness to die on the cross, a willingness to die rather to kill, an unwillingness to perpetuate the cycle of violence.
- However, let's be clear about Jesus' way of peace: the way of Jesus, the way of the cross, isn't a statement about the most effective or efficient way of mitigating violence, at least not in the short run. No, it is a faith statement, a conviction about the way God deals with violence: not retaliating or perpetuating violence, but absorbing it in his own being and thereby breaking the vicious cycle of violence. It takes patience and the long view to follow Jesus' way of peace—the perspective that in the long view God's way of peace will prevail.

Roberta wrote a column based on her conversation with me. She followed up with three more columns drawing on feedback she got from *Toledo Blade* readers.

This morning Mark and I are beginning a series of sermons on peace. I'll be looking at three different passages this morning.

**Isaiah 53:3-9:** This passage is one of four so-called servant songs in Isaiah. In this passage the servant is portrayed as a suffering servant. Who is this servant, the writer himself? Some other undesignated Hebrew leader? Collectively the whole people of the nation Israel?

This servant song came to be seen as both a prophecy of Jesus, particularly of the nature of his death, and a template for the way he lived in the face of conflict and violence. He was despised and rejected, struck down and afflicted. He was like a lamb taken to be slaughtered. Yet he bore it all, silently, non-violently, and he didn't open his mouth.

This passage is often used as way to explain Jesus' death as atonement for our sins. *The LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.... he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.*

While it can be said that Jesus died both because of our sin and for our sin and our redemption, there is more to it than that. Already here—as well as other places in scripture—we get an indication that the way Jesus died was a sign of the way God deals with sin and conflict and violence and war in the world: by bearing it in his own person, by not retaliating, but willingly suffering. It is God's way of breaking the cycle of violence.

**John 18:33-38a:** This scene is the trial of Jesus before the Roman governor, Pilate. A fundamental question arises: is Jesus' God's anointed? Is he, in other words, the one of whom Isaiah talked about in the servant song of chapter 53? Or was he the king of Israel? Pilate needed to know who and what he was dealing with. What was at stake?

At another level, there's a different trial going on, a trial between the ways of this world, and the ways of God—between the kingdoms of this world and the kingdom of God. The kingdoms of this world depend on the use and the threat of violence, or at least of coercion, sometimes lethal coercion. Jesus says he represents a different kind of kingdom, a non-violent, non-retaliatory kingdom. Hence, he doesn't call down a host of angels to protect him nor does he prompt his disciples to take up arms to prevent his own death.

Jesus would rather die than be killed. He was born and lived to bear witness to a different way of dealing with conflict and violence in the world.

In the course of their conversation, Pilate asked Jesus a strange question: what is truth? There isn't an abstract answer to this question. Jesus is the truth embodied, standing right there in the flesh before Pilate. He is the way to truth and the life. He is about to die the way he lived: a life of non-violence, of peace, of seeking God's kingdom here in this world rather than reinforcing the coerciveness of the kingdoms of this world.

**1 Peter 2:20-23:** The immediate context was probably Christians who were being abused by their employers. Peter said it's no credit to them if they're abused for doing wrong. But if they're abused for doing right, that signals that they are following the example of Jesus.

We have come full cycle with this text: v. 23 is actually a reference to Is. 53 (not quoted verbatim and taken more from the Greek translation of the Old Testament than the Hebrew Bible): *When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly.*

The point here is that Jesus, portrayed as the suffering servant, is the example by which Christians should live. To put it in Jesus' own words from the gospels: if you want to be my disciple, take up your cross and follow me. This is a path of love, peace, and non-violence which, nevertheless, could lead to the death of Jesus' followers because their ways and means were at cross purposes with those of the world.

This is life lived according to the kingdom of God rather than the kingdoms of this world. These 2 kingdoms are at cross purposes and sometimes are in conflict with each other. Christians can get caught between them and have to suffer the consequences. They should do so in a non-retaliatory fashion, embodying the peace of Christ.

Two cautionary words: It would be a mistake to think Christian pacifism is based on a series of biblical prooftexts about being peacemakers and loving our enemies. As I tried to show in brief this morning, there is a narrative from the prophets through Jesus life, teachings and death on the cross, through the early life of the Christian churches that points to suffering, non-violent love as God's way of dealing with the coercive powers of this world. The so-called prooftexts are important, but should be read in the context of this broader narrative.

Second, it would also be a mistake to think that Jesus way of peace is merely a tactic for attaining a good social goal—peace and harmony. Rather, it is a way of life that grows out of a question: are we willing to follow Jesus' way even if it costs us our lives? It calls for a decision, a life-and-death decision. *For to **this you have been called**, Peter wrote, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps.* We should not treat this call lightly. If we respond positively to it, Jesus' way of peace is our vocation, the way we live out our lives.

Not all Christians even respond to this Jesus' way of peace. We have to contend with the observations of Elie Wiesel, a Jewish writer who survived the Holocaust. Wiesel pointed out that some of the mass murderers in the twentieth century were baptized Christians. And second,

many non-Christians understand that Jesus was a person of peace, yet a large segment of Christians do not.

Many of you know the story about Le Chambon, the French Christian community that harbored many Jews during World War II. It's estimated that they saved the lives of 5,000 Jewish people, including 3,000 children, who might otherwise have been sent to the death camps in Germany.

When people from this community were asked after the war why they did this noble act at great risk to themselves, they were somewhat baffled by the question. Isn't this what Christians do?

This story was made famous by Philip Hallie, a philosophy professor, who wrote the book *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed* about this community and their fearless leaders, Andre and Magde Trocme. Andre was a Reformed pastor in Le Chambon.

Less well known is the story behind Philip Hallie, author of *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed*. Haillie grew up in a tough neighborhood in Chicago. Growing up he was repeatedly bullied and beat up by tough guys in the neighborhood—until an uncle took him aside and taught him how to defend himself. After that the bullies left him alone. This experience led him to adopt the philosophy that force must be met with greater force, violence with even greater violence.

Haillie served in the military during WWII and it seemed to him that this was an example on a grand scale of violence being met with and overcome by greater and justifiable violence. He had no doubt that he killed some soldiers on the other side, which he saw as a necessary evil.

While teaching philosophy Haillie discovered this story about the Le Chamdon community and he wrote the book about it. While Hallie himself never became a pacifist, he came to see in the Le Chambon community another and very legitimate way for dealing with violence in the world: love, nonviolence, non-retaliation, and hospitality toward the victims of violence, even if it put them at great risk.

Hallie used the analogy of a hurricane and the eye of the hurricane: in the world there is great force and much damage done, just like in a hurricane. But in the eye of the hurricane there is peace and calm, refuge from the ravages of the storm. He likened the Le Chambon community to the eye of the storm: there was much turmoil all around them, but they lived a life of peace in the eye of that storm, and they provided a refuge for people ravished by the ferocity of the hurricane.

All analogies have their limits and should be used with care. That said, I think this image of the eye of the storm is one useful image of the church in the world, so long as we don't use it to justify the church escaping from the ravages of the world. In the eye of the hurricane we refuse to meet force with greater force. We don't try to escape turmoil, but through our lives and our witness and our hospitality we try to enlarge the eye of the storm and welcome people into the peace of living Jesus' way in Jesus' community, the church.