

The Peace that Calms the Storm

by Mike Miles

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When I agreed to preach today as just another slot to fill with our deep bench of homegrown preachers, it wasn't on my radar that this was going to be anything other than just another Sunday. Barb and I were actually on the road to attend two very different reunions of Christian communities that we have been involved with over five decades. That's going to be a different story for another day.

Then the texts started coming in: "Oh, by the way"... and now here we are with all of you for this special event with special guests and so much folderol that I'm going to pretend none of this is happening, just be my happy little self, try not to do anything that would embarrass Barb, and do it all in less than 12 minutes. So, hang on.

Our reading from the Hebrew Scriptures today is from Job. Job, along with Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, the Psalms and some books from the Apocrypha, are considered the books of Wisdom. They are reflections on practical matters of life and philosophy and not meant to be taken as literal history. Job is mostly about the nature of suffering.

Job is portrayed as a special friend of God who was rewarded with abundant wealth and blessing. Satan complains to God that his unfair economic advantage is the only reason Job loves God, so he is given permission to torment Job with every malady he can concoct except death. Job survives and refuses to turn his back on God even though his wife tells him to curse God and die and his friends tell him he must have some hidden sin somewhere.

God defends themselves (and just to be clear, in Genesis God creates humans "in our image and after our likeness") in a poetic takedown for the ages: "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation. Who shut up the sea behind the doors when it burst forth from the womb. Have you ever given orders to the morning or shown the dawn its place. Have you journeyed to the spring of the sea or walked in the recesses of the deep?" It goes on like this for page after page after page. You get the picture.

So then Jesus shows up as the Incarnation of the Presence that will not be questioned and starts doing stuff that raises lots of questions, everyday, with both his words and antics- like in today's Gospel reading.

He is asleep in a boat encountering a storm that has seasoned fishermen wondering if they are going to survive. They have the nerve to wake him up as if there is anything he can really do about it. So, of course he rubs the sleep out of his eyes, speaks to the wind, rebukes the waves and his companions, and perhaps even goes back to sleep when they are left with a calm that

shakes them more than a violent storm ever could. “Who is this that even the wind and sea obey?”

“Do not be afraid” in all its varied iterations, is the most repeated exhortation throughout the scriptures. When he leaves the upper room to begin his final showdown with the Empire de jour, he centers himself with prayer in Gethsemane and then the peace that passes all understanding kicks into gear. He gets arrested and goes on trial with such confidence, and mostly silence, that Pilate becomes frightened and does all he can do to let him go.

He ends up tortured and brutally killed but declares from the cross, before he dies, “It, his mission, is accomplished”. This is the ultimate calm before the storm at the tomb three days later that changed history.

So what does history teach us about Jesus’ show down with Empire? A Google search worded “Does Christianity oppose Empire” comes back with some equivocation. The AI answer is “it is complex” and then goes on to talk about Constantine adopting Christianity as the faith of the Roman Empire which led to the Crusades and colonial conquests all over the globe. When asked “Does Jesus oppose Empire”, the answer is unequivocally yes. There is the “Rendering to Caesar” passage in Romans 13 but it places conditions on “rendering” to, if you can render in love do it, if not, you can pretty much ignore them but there may be consequences- you know fines, prison exile, death. The Presence who will not be questioned is not only NOT intimidated by Empire, they know all its weaknesses and how it will collapse of its own accord every time.

Having been a long time student of Satyagraha or Truth Force, a term coined by Gandhi but practiced by multitudes for millennia, I will offer up some examples pertinent to our Gospel text for the day. Jesus called it “agape” and it works whether practiced in everyday, individual interactions between people or when taking down Empires.

While he is widely known as the patron saint of animals, Francis of Assisi’s commitment to peace was his crowning achievement. It was put to the test in the 13th century when he and his associate Brother Illuminato sailed to Damietta in Egypt and walked 8 miles, across enemy lines talk to with Sultan al-Kamil, nephew of Saladin. Francis was horrified by the slaughter inflicted on Egyptians by marauding crusaders. Al Kamil was so impressed by his demeanor and his convictions, that he provided him safe passage home and showed mercy on crusaders, who had begun to lose the war, instead of annihilating them.

A life-changing book I read while in jail for walking up another driveway I was told not to be on is [Dying We Live](#). It is a compilation of letters written by Germans in Hitler’s prisons waiting to be executed. Their quiet resolve in the face of inevitable outcomes is actually very uplifting. Yet another testament to the Peace that passes all understanding. It was so compelling to me, that I was asked to write the forward to a re-issue of the book in 2009.

Martin Luther King and Thich Nhat Hanh became brothers in non violent resistance to the Viet Nam war in what King called the Beloved Community. Inspired by compassion and historic

examples, millions of people risked their personal freedom and lives by getting in the way of business as usual, making the war too costly for Empire to continue it.

And today, while Palestine itself may not be free, the Palestinian people are, laying down their lives and the lives of their children to expose the gravity of crimes being waged against all humanity. Their suffering is invoking Resurrection to be unleashed yet again. Millions are supporting them all over the world. While the US stands alone opposing an immediate and unconditional ceasefire, 10 more countries recognized them as a state this week bringing the total to 156. The Global Samud Flotilla now stands at 51 boats and they are days away from their own potential encounter with yet another of Empire's bloody crosses. Please stay tuned.

The Presence that will not be questioned is, and always has been, standing over and intervening in where we all are going together as a global family. The good news is that while we are not responsible for the outcome, we all have our part to play. As the poet says, "we change people if we do at all by being something irresistible not by demanding something impossible". Here at West Denmark, empowered by the Feast of Remembrance, and in the embrace of each other, the peace that calms the Storm, welcomes all who come.