

Resisting the Slaps

January 16, 2022

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Sunday

Cathedral Church of St. Paul

The Rt. Rev. Dr. Bonnie A. Perry

Luke 6:27-36

I propose to show, inspired by the non-violent legacy of MLK, we are the people God is calling to create the next non-violent movements to create the change for which God is longing, so that those hearing this sermon, will use the gifts they have to create these movements.

May the God...

Good Morning!

Jesus said, "But I say to you who are willing to hear:...If someone slaps you on the cheek, turn and offer the other cheek as well." Luke 6:29

How many of us have ever been any good at turning the other cheek? How many of us have heard that line in church or had our mothers admonish us with this very verse and think to ourselves, "Yes, that's exactly what I want to do. This is going to be my "go to" plan. If I do nothing else I'll turn my cheek....

Is that how you find yourself thinking....?

Me? Welllllllllll. (ugh)

Not that I am likely to get into physical altercations, but there are lots of ways of slapping cheeks, besides putting hand to skin. So, when it happens to me, ---physically or metaphorically—do I simply turn my head, open my heart and offer the opposite side of my face? Or is it far more likely that I'll step back and prepare to launch my own return attack.

But what, if we did, as Jesus is asking?

What is actually going on here? Is what Jesus is talking about in this passage a passive acceptance of violence? Is it a weak response to an assault?

What's it mean to turn the other cheek? What's going on in this passage?

Imagine the scenario if you will. And to give ourselves a bit of perspective, imagine watching someone strike the cheek of someone you love. Let's watch: Closely observing that person, our person, who when slapped: doesn't step back, doesn't pull back, doesn't lose eye contact, or shift their weight back to their heels. Instead, we watch that person who we love remain strong, stand tall, eyes open, feet grounded, and then with a twist of their pelvis, a bend in their knee, they turn their head and present the other cheek. Is this a passive person, knocked into subservient submission?

I don't think so. No, this is a grounded child of God, offering a moment of non-violent resistance. It's kind of stunning and breathtaking to watch. When does this individual

"saying no," when does this solitary moment of resisting what is wrong, when does this individual moment become a collective movement?

It is not by happenstance that we are contemplating this particular piece of scripture on the weekend of the anniversary of The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr's birthday. We know that Blessed Martin, Dr. King, incarnated this passage, he embodied this scripture in his formation and leadership of the non-violent Civil Rights Movement. A movement of meaning, challenge, change and love; a movement in history and a moment in time that altered the course of our world. Friends, we are receptors of that work, inheritors of that dream. Us. Not someone else, but You and I.

I wonder, given the pain, crisis and polarities of our country, I wonder are there ways to respond to the "slaps" that just seem to keep happening. Tired as we are, exhausted by this pandemic, we might be tempted to acquiesce passively to all that is happening, to back off from *the slaps* that are happening, or retreat and lament with only people who think and feel as we do.

Or might we begin to organize some non-violent resistance to the slaps that are happening.

The slap that:

the right for all eligible US Citizens to vote, without regard to our race, class, education, employment hours or political beliefs, a right that was hard won by Dr. King is again very much under attack.

The slap: that voting districts are routinely *gerrymandered* to support the political party of power in that state, republicans and democrats alike.

The slap: that universal background checks for all prospective gun owners is continually prevented by state and national legislators beholden to the National Rifle Association.

The slap that our children attend schools with the very real fear that they may be shot by one of their classmates, because our country has lacked the collective will to find creative solutions to stop the killing.

How do we refuse to accept evils in our communities? How might we turn our cheeks and begin the work of creating non-violent movements that alter our paths and move us toward a beloved community?

How we collectively respond to the slaps will determine our course. Dr. King was adamant that turning the other cheek meant never resorting to violence, and that the course of non-violently resisting never involved humiliating one's opponents, instead to seek "understanding and friendship." Evil was always to be opposed, but not the people perpetuating the evil. King says in his book, *Stride Toward Freedom*, "The resister should be motivated by love and a redeeming good will for all [people] men."

In his book, *Where do we Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* Written the year before he died, King says, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that. The beauty of nonviolence is that in its own way and in its own time it seeks to break the chain reaction of evil" pp 62-63

Friends, we are the custodians of the goodness of our world, let us all stand together, and turn our cheeks, and organize and transform our world.

We can do this with God, and with each other.

Amen.