

Jan 30 2022 Fourth Sunday after Epiphany  
Jesus' Mission: Healing, and Forgiveness, Mercy Without Boundaries  
Pr. Steve

In the name of God, Abba Imma, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Jesus stopped...in the middle of a sentence. He omitted from the passage [he read] from Isaiah 61 the final part: '*...and our God will deliver us a day of vengeance on our enemies.*' The best part!! The hometown crowd is astonished. They're dumbfounded, and then they are outraged, because everyone knows what Gentiles are like: godless, sinful, wicked, evil, violent people. Why would you deny us our hostility? This is what was fueling the zealots of Jesus' day and their nationalism--Israel first!

But Jesus speaks only of God's mercy--and then he kind of rubs it in. Now in Elijah's day, there was famine throughout the land, but God said to Elijah, '*Go to that pagan widow outside of Israel.*' Did he have to say that? And in Elisha's day, leprosy was throughout the land, but the only person who was healed was Naaman...the Syrian.

This is Jesus' mission--healing, and forgiveness, mercy without boundaries. And it is a stroke of genius for Luke to put this story at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry, because it is through this lens that we have to see everything Jesus does in the Gospel of Luke. It is portraying Luke's theme: the non-violent coming of our God.

And then the hometown crowd took him outside to throw him off a cliff. (Just like most Sundays here--it's just...it's what you do to the preacher. Wow!)

Epiphany falls on January 6th every year: it's 12 days after Christmas. A year ago, it was the assault on the Capitol, on democracy, on the Constitution. People were maimed, and scarred for life. People died. It was a day of darkness.

This year, Epiphany returns to its normal spirit: the season initiating light bursting into a dark world when the Wise Ones arrived, remember that? And they've been coming to us week after week, Martin Luther King. Last week, Thich Nhat Hanh. And today, Mahatma Gandhi, who on this day in 1948, was assassinated by a fundamentalist Hindu.

Gandhi's life was devotion to truth. He said, "Even if you are a minority of one, the truth is still the truth." And, "Non-violence and truth are two sides of the same coin." They need each other. To tell the truth, you have to be nonviolent. To be nonviolent, you have to tell the truth. Violence doesn't need the truth.

The first victim of war is...truth, that's the ancient saying. First victim of war, first victim of violence, is truth. War is word-less. It has no interest in communication, in change or healing, let alone mercy. Peace, the practice, the living of peace, depends upon recovering our own right minds. Jesus' word for this in the Gospels, as it comes to us in Greek, is *metanoia*. We need a

new mind. We need a fresh perspective. We need a greater understanding. That's when *metanoia* is all about. It's the breakthrough, fresh start.

Resentment is easy, right? Resentment fuels anger, hatred, division, chaos, war, violence, and we all can do it [at the] drop of a hat. But a receptive mind requires awareness, the capacity to pause, a willingness to see multiple perspectives, a fresh view, and a greater understanding. A receptive mind is hard work. Violence depends upon our own calculations; non-violence depends upon God. True spiritual freedom liberates both the oppressed and the oppressor. The means create the ends. This is what Gandhi learned from Jesus--the means create the ends.

*Satyagraha* was Gandhi's word for non-violence. Non-violence is not just my promise to you that I won't hit or hurt you. That's not non-violence. *Satyagraha* means pressing for the truth. It's all about bringing to light, the dynamics of what's going on when there is brokenness between people, in relationships, or community, or the social order, because violence likes to hide in the dark, behind protocols, behind laws, behind rules. It doesn't want to be found out. *Satyagraha* is about unmasking the truth of what's going on.

Modern tyrannies emphasize the irreversibility of evil, and therefore, all uncertainties must be gotten rid of. Eliminate the uncertainties. *There should be no sin among us, should there? Can I get an Amen? No sin, it's unacceptable! Right, right?* That's the righteousness that is so often appealed to, and it is so deceitful.

*Satyagraha* understands that the good that we do is uncertain, fluid, [and] sometimes flaky, isn't it? because suffering, and fear, and failure persist. And the good that we do must be renewed each day, every day, again, and again, and again.

Tyrants claim, and they love to proclaim that, '*We know where evil is. It's obvious. It's clear cut. It's definite. It's irreversible.*' (Like the 49ers and the Rams, you know what I mean?) '*This is no game,*' the tyrants tell us. '*Do not trust tolerance, kindness, empathy. Do not trust reason, questions, conscience. These are the enemy. They interfere. They're weak. They get in the way of us accomplishing the eradication that must be accomplished, if there is to be no sin among us.*'

You know, the most stunning thing to me, is that for all of the ugliness and brutality of fascism, what fascism weaponizes is purity. '*We are the pure ones. We're not like those people like that ilk. We'll have none of that here. We're all doing it for the sake of purity.*' When dark appears as light, look out! Look out!

Mercy means constant, mutual release--that's why it's so hard--constant, mutual release because the evils we experience, we share in common--and the solutions we need must also be shared in common. So, our first duty is *metanoia*, to recover our right minds, and *satyagraha* to press for the truth, recognizing the first truth is our own fallibility. It's all right. It's okay. God's mercy is vast. Give yourself a break.

I've said it for so many years, and I'll go on repeating it, every one of us knows how much mercy we need, how much understanding and compassion each of us needs. It's so clear, isn't it?

What we need is constant, mutual release. This is how we become human beings, acknowledging our own fallibility. Then we know we need God, and mercy, and the truth, because peace requires a soul--violence doesn't.

We're soul-building here. God help us--we're soul-building here. And when we know that, we can join in St. Paul's great hymn to love: 'Love's greatest joy is truth.' [1 Cor. 13:6]

Thanks be to God.

Amen.

The peace, which surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen.