

“Suffering Afflictions”

“I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.”
Matthew 5:29

Besides Satan, can you think of someone who you might say is an evil person? I can think of one or two politicians or very powerful rascals over the years whom I might have said were evil persons. Although I don't like making such a judgement because there is good in everyone. But when Jesus said “Don't resist an evil person.” it took me aback. If someone came into our sanctuary with an assault weapon I would certainly resist them. I've already imagined such a thing happening. There are things we would say are just natural to do - like hitting back at someone who hits me. It would be natural for me to resist someone who makes a false accusation about me and to look for a rebuke of them.

Jesus would see all of these so-called natural reactions as opportunities to exhibit the love of his Father. Oswald Chambers says that a personal insult becomes an opportunity for a saint to reveal the incredible sweetness of the Lord Jesus. Jesus was the king of kings and lord of lords. But his kingdom is a spiritual one, it is beyond our earthly nature. That is - it is not in the “natural” realm.

I reread chapter 5 of Matthew, where we find the beatitudes and the sermon on the mount. Jesus preaches to us we are NOT to be satisfied with only doing our duty – obeying the ten commandments which we will study in Sunday School today. But we need to do what is NOT our duty. It is not our DUTY to go the second mile. It is not our DUTY to turn the other cheek. And Jesus goes further. If it is our ambition to be HIS disciples we WILL do these things. Turn the other cheek, go the second mile.

A mistake I have made is to focus on my rights. For example, I might find myself thinking that I have a right to not have my sleep interrupted at 2 in the morning by my friend who is drunk and needs a ride home. Another example: What if Pastor Kevin heard his phone ringing at 3 in the morning but ignored it, saying to himself: I have a right to my sleep, but the call was from a church member whose wife just died? Would you think he is being a good disciple of Christ? And what about my drunk friend? After all it was his choice to get drunk and he deserves to receive whatever he would out on the streets. What if some passed by me telling a friend “I am a saint.” And this passerby goes on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram and tell everyone that he heard Glenn Currier bragging to someone that he is a saint. When in fact I was just telling my friend that St. Paul called the Philippians and other Christians “saints.” And that passerby proclaims on his Facebook posting “Glenn Currier claims to be saint. But I knew him from way back and he cussed and gossiped with the best of them - what a hypocrite he is claiming to be a saint.” This guy obviously misrepresented me and took my statement out of context. I might be justified saying that this guy violated my right to privacy. My right! But when I insist on having my own rights, I might actually be hurting the Son of God. When in reality I could prevent Christ and his church from being hurt by taking the blows of the Twitter guy and saying nothing.

In Colossians 1:24 Saint Paul says this to the Colossians: “Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.” Again, Paul reminds us that Christ is alive here and in the church. Furthermore, by taking the blow of being misrepresented and misunderstood like Jesus did so often, then I am honoring our Lord Jesus Christ. It is his honor the honor of the Body of Christ that is at stake, not my own.

Jesus said in Matthew 5:6: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Oswald Chambers puts it a different way: “Never look for righteousness in the other person, but never cease to be righteous yourself.” That's a pretty big challenge, I think. He goes on to say we should not wear ourselves out looking for justice, but instead we should never ever cease giving it.

Jesus' teachings so often are the opposite to what seems natural. That is why it is NOT easy to be a disciple of Jesus. And that is why I kept thinking about Dietrich Bonhoeffer and his book, The Cost of Discipleship. He said we should not look at grace or talk about it assuming that it is cheap. He believed that the call to discipleship involved suffering and sacrifice. This is because anyone who follows Jesus must also pick up his cross and follow the path of suffering that Jesus walks. Just like Jesus suffered in solidarity with us, so must Christians who really want to be disciples of Jesus.

I should consider it a privilege to pick up the cross of Jesus when I suffer a back ache, or be in solidarity with my wife in her suffering with her back or my sister in her trauma of finding and moving into a new place at the age of 75 in the city of Portland Oregon where she has no relatives. It is a privilege to listen to her and encourage her in her state of being overwhelmed.

Parents and grandparents feel the pain being suffered by their children and their children. They bear it without complaint and perhaps even with a sad smile because it is their privilege to pay the cost of being a disciple of Christ.