

RADICAL INTENTION

[written in oral style]

Matthew 26:51-51; Romans 12:18-21
Anabaptist series

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Gordon Allaby

Before I begin, I must applaud the previous three preachers in this series, and respect the pattern of citing them. So, I will--Carmen, Russ and Troy. But, I don't want to leave anyone out, so I'll cite the last preacher, who will present on March 3--Kendra.

So, credits aside, I will make an intentional statement by beginning my sermon with the Biblical passages. They are first.

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The Matthew text gives us a snippet in the life of Jesus. It reveals how Jesus responded to violence and to the use of weapons. This is a powerful example for trying to follow the ways of Jesus.

Jesus explains why he chooses non-resistance / why he rejects violence as a response to violence. His justification is logical.

Doing violence when violently assaulted adds to the violence. It doesn't solve/resolve the issue.

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I've heard the saying, "You fight fire with fire."

NO! That is wrong. Fire is defeated by removing the fuel source and Oxygen. Burning to do that is violent and risky.

This text gives us insight in how to be a faithful follower of Jesus, and also gives sound reasoning.

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The Roman 12 passage expands on the HOW to do the way of peace, and what Christian peace living is about.

And, I hope we all see that the way of peace is NOT passive.

Verse 18 states, "If it is possible, so far as it depends on you."

Remember this line.

Continuing,..... "live peaceably with all." .... With all.

The "if possible" may seem like wiggle room in the mandate.

Yet, it's not a permission to shrug our shoulders and yield to our culture's tendency to respond to violence with violence.

{More on this later}

Vs 19 --We are not to avenge / get back / get even or do "judgment"

We are to trust God for that,.....which is a good idea since we are not as smart as we tend to think we are.

Verse 20 grants us some details. This is the "how to" part.

If our enemy is hungry, then feed them. If thirsty, then give him/her something to drink. There is No mention of building a wall.

These instructions are proactive, not passive.

And, the part about doing such actions will heap burning coals on their heads,...is not about gleeful, poetic justice.

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Providing for needs first prompts us to search and discover what are those needs. When we do, we'll understand that this enemy is of value. We won't demonize and dismiss an enemy. Moreover, satisfying those needs is a creative way of conflict resolution / of reducing the motivation to be hostile.

The compassion and kindness will surprise the enemy, even confuse the enemy. As they sort it out, the unorthodox gestures will likely cause their thoughts to feel like "burning coals."

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Paul is describing transforming initiatives that invite an enemy to no longer be an enemy-- in their eyes and ours.

To underline this, Paul reminds us as he presents sound reasoning: Don't be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

That makes sense, and it is similar to Jesus' rationalization about not doing violence. Ending the cycle of violence, requires bold and creative initiatives for good. This is action, and not being passive.

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That is the Biblical lesson, and now on to the Anabaptist connection.

I like this part because it includes some history. I love studying history.

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The 16th century Anabaptists existed only for a very short period of time. They were considered radical, and rightly so.

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Remember that in the early 1500s, because of the printing press, books were available, especially the Bible.

Individuals could possess Bibles, and some people could even read.

In 1517, Martin Luther opened the door to new ways / to embracing deviant-from-THE Catholic church Biblical interpretations. Luther opened the door to grasping new found freedoms, too. Luther opened the door because he got away with challenging the church, and then others attempted to do the same.

A group of religious leaders in the Swiss confederation and what is now Southern Germany, started adopting new insights and practices from reading the NT, such as the connection to choosing to follow Christ and then being baptized.

Inspired by that, they baptized those who agreed with them.

Conrad Grebel was one of those leaders.

No doubt, many were attracted to these long hidden and suppressed Biblical Truths, in part because the euphoria of being free from the church and state's tyranny and taxes. There was a close tie between the church and government.

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Others, started naming these radical reformers as Anabaptists -- re-baptizers. It was a label that the radical reformers did not care for.

They argued the infant baptism wasn't valid, so they were not re-baptizing. Still, the label stuck, even though they used other self-identifying names, In a few short years, most were labelled Mennonite.

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For those without a passion for history, I don't want your eyes to glass over, so I'll add just a few more historical notations to show how radical these so called Anabaptists were.

Radical means breaking from the past traditions, a new way, and often an extremely different way.

Not only did they embrace what we call believer's baptism, but they were also for the separation of church and state.

They advocated for an egalitarian society, and they allowed new interpretations of the scriptures.....when it was done in community.

Theology was done in community, and usually lead by those who could read / those with some training.

The radical reformers/ the Anabaptists were deemed a threat to law and order, and soon were persecuted. One reason is The Catholic church recorded infant baptisms. People's registrations were used by the church and political leaders for taxation and control. The radical reformers were like anarchists.

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So,.....to today's topic: Anabaptists and non-resistance.

Some of the early Anabaptist leader brought their value of literalism to those they nurtured, and in their pursuit to be faithful followers of Jesus, they tried to mimic what Jesus did...to the letter.

The Matthew text showed that Jesus did not turn to violence, so they also should not.

Other leaders came from a more mystic or monastic tradition, and they inspired their followers to embrace the healing, peaceful and loving nature of Jesus. This was a broader view they valued.

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The 1527 document called, Schleitheim contained 7 principles that the radical reformers affirmed. Number 7 was a ban on the use of any weapon.

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For different reasons, both types, literalists and mystics, chose to reject violence and revenge, and so did Menno Simons.

The way of peace / of non-resistance is affirmed by Mennonites to this day. This way of peace is frequently called being a pacifist.

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Interestingly, the term Anabaptist has become increasingly popular in the past 60-70 years. It's use is much like an archetype for correctness, similar to referring to the NT church as the model.

However, the modern view of Anabaptism has acquired new innuendos, some garnered from the romantic peace-nick era... and others, such as an emphasis in active social justice as a defence for being conscious objectors.

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The humanistic logic and the romantic peace and love movement are what inspired me to be a pacifist, when I was 19.

Oh, and likely having Mennonite youth leaders in my Baptist church helped, too.

I was influenced by the horrors of the news reports from Vietnam combined with the hopeful alternative of Loving one another and give peace a chance.

It made sense, and I was "moved" to claim pacifism.

Yet, there is a problem in my transformative process.

I did NOT arrive at that decision because of reading about Jesus or what being a Christian means. As an afterthought, I would defend myself with scripture, but the Bible was not what changed me.

The problem is that I was inspired by my culture. During my formative years, peace, nature and love were the wallpaper of my culture.

Things can get a little weird, if we give so much power to our culture.

Weird as in adopting a fear and hatred against immigrants or anyone who is different.....just because that is the political mantra.

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I strongly affirm that the original Anabaptists got it right.

We should do something radical,.....by making it a priority to let the teaching from and about Jesus form our values and identity.

As we do, let us realize that the Bible is the beginning, and not the end all. There is more to life than one book.

I think the Bible, with our Anabaptist bias for the Gospels, must come first.

Some may quiver by this assertion, assuming the literalists will dictate our destiny.

However, please recall that the early Anabaptists possessed a blend of perspectives, and all tried to reached for the greater good.

Perhaps, we can embrace that inclusivity, too.

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I also strongly affirm non-resistance -- pacifism.

Pacifism is not being a passive wimp, far from it.

Pacifism is doing creative, transforming initiatives such as what Paul proposed in Romans.

Pacifism rejects / refuses violence.

Pacifism is choosing to take non-violent action that could bring healing and restoration.

Moreover, pacifism is not an infallible statue. It is not a label we can securely hide behind.

Pacifism is Radical intention.

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Remember Paul's caveat?

"If it is possible, so far as it depends on you."

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Following Christ's way of peace depends on each of us making that choice to be/ to live that way. It depends on us.

And, if possible is ....well.....accurate.

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I am a pacifist, but I have the capacity to do terrible violence.

My goal / my desire is that I will rise above the temptation to do violence. My commitment is to respond with love, grace and peace.

But, I cannot guarantee that I will.

Love and Peace are constant and daily choices.

My intent is to be as Christ / to respond as Jesus did.

This intention is not weakly defined suggesting a hope or a wish.

This intention must not be used as an excuse for failure.

This radical intention to do peace demands preparation, practice and determination.

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When you intend to wake up at a certain time, you set your alarm.

You plan and take action.

When we intend to eat supper, we, in advance, secure food, and then make all the preparations. Plus, the more we practice, the better we eat.

Our church intends to have a useable parking lot and sponsor refugees, and we are taking strong action to make sure that will more than likely happen.

That sort of intention is what is required to be a pacifist.....and more.

Let us apply Radical intention to all noble and life giving aspects in our world.

Let us intend to live in peace as Jesus did.

Let's be radical in doing transformative initiatives, even if it causes our enemy's thoughts to feel like burning coals.

Let us intend to have our hearts set on fire,.....by taking action to be connected to God.....and to daily strive to be as Christ.

In addition, in all our relationships, may they be fed by daily vows / commitments.....radical intentions.

I propose that Each day, you pledge your devotion and love to your partner, to a friend, your child or parents. And, invest in that intention with real action. If we neglect our intentions, then we may get lost.

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Finally, I admire the radical aspect of the early Anabaptists.
They were willing to risk change / to do something bigfor God.

Perhaps, we can rediscover that passion / that intention... to turn our world upside down for the sake of God.