

Title: Fighting for Non-violence

Let us pray.

Most holy, Lord God, you inserted yourself into a violent world advocating for peace and love, ultimately sending your son to emphasize your message and demonstrate a non-violent response; may we be constantly inspired to follow Jesus and advocate for non-violence, through your incarnate love, Christ Jesus, we pray. Amen.

“Students at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Florida walked out of their classrooms Wednesday, gathered on the campus football field, and embraced each other. As the school chorus played inspirational music over a loudspeaker, the students chanted in unison: ‘MSD! MSD!’

“It was a month to the day after a former student wielding an AR-15 assault-style rifle strode into one of the school buildings and opened fire, killing 14 students and three staff members.

“The Parkland protest was echoed in schools across the nation as students staged 17-minute walkouts — one minute for each of the shooting victims — aimed at pressuring federal lawmakers to enact gun control laws. The Parkland students argue such laws will protect others from having to face the kind of trauma they experienced.

“More than 3,000 walkouts were planned around the world, organizers said (which included many in California: including Sacramento, El Dorado, and Amador Counties).

“Said Stoneman Douglas junior Susana Matta, ‘We are here to protest because we know that more can be done, not just statewide but nationwide.’

“The students are working hard to maintain the momentum of their movement; they know such persistence is necessary if they are going to persuade lawmakers at the state and national level to take more action.

“Thousands of students also gathered on Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the White House, holding colourful signs and cheering in support of gun control.” (CBC News)

Guns are not evil. People can be evil and evil people can be violent. Human beings have invented many tools. Human beings seem to naturally invent

tools to get a job done. When human beings took up war to settle differences or to violently take what another group has, tools were made. Some the greatest inventions in history are products of war.

We continue to perfect more efficient ways to kill each other. Of course, the ultimate is nuclear weapons. They are very efficient. Short of nuclear weapons, we also continue to perfect conventional weapons with the goal to kill the most people in the shortest time. The one of the latest innovations of this is the assault weapon.

Some think that we live in very violent times. However, a careful review of history reveals that ancient times were much more violent. The Romans invented a way to produce the most pain and torture to kill someone – crucifixion. It seems that the Roman aristocracy were immune to violence. Crucifixion was a gruesome way to pacify a vast empire.

For Jesus and his followers, things were dangerous and tense. Jesus travels to Jerusalem, against advice for his safety, to raise Lazarus from the grave in Bethany. Bethany is just over the hill, the Mount of Olives, from Jerusalem. The disciples rightly knew that the religious authorities would likely seek Jesus' life. Jesus ignored their advice.

After Lazarus was raised from the dead, the religious authorities conspired to have both Jesus and Lazarus murdered. Jesus was threatening their authority. Jesus' popularity was diminishing the people's piety for the temple rituals.

Then to add insult to their misery, Jesus rides a donkey triumphally into Jerusalem. Everyone must have noticed the commotion. Jesus' riding into the city on a donkey would be known by everyone, including the Romans, that it is kings who ride into their capital city on donkeys. The crowd is behind Jesus, making it difficult to arrest him, at least, not openly. They can't kill Lazarus without killing Jesus, because Jesus would probably just raise him up again.

Jerusalem was abuzz with the story of Lazarus rising from the grave. With the Passover approaching, people from everywhere were in Jerusalem and for many of them, this is the first time that they learn about this prophet from

Galilee. They join the Jesus bandwagon too. The Pharisees throw up their hands because “the world has gone after him.” (John 12:19b)

Jews from all over the empire and outside the empire were in Jerusalem for the Passover. Practically all Jews from outside Palestine spoke Greek. When John says that some Greeks wanted to meet Jesus, John means Greek-speaking Jews. These Greek speakers seemed to have noticed that Philip was among Jesus’ followers and asked if Philip could arrange a meeting. It was likely that Philip knew Greek.

Philip does not seem confident enough to speak to Jesus directly, so he asks Andrew to help him out. This also may be out of concern that potential assassins might try to get close to Jesus and these Greek speakers needed some sort of vetting.

When Philip and Andrew approach Jesus with the request, typical Jesus does not give a yes or no answer. Jesus says, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.” (John 12:23b) Perhaps there was some discussion about how safe it would be for strangers to get close to Jesus. Jesus is saying that it didn’t matter if they were assassins or not. Jesus is about to die anyway.

Jesus explains his statement with a brief parable. You can’t get wheat unless you take a seemingly dead seed and put it in the ground. You bury it like you would a dead person. Only then can this dead thing live and bear much fruit. I think what Jesus was saying is that the Jesus movement cannot thrive unless Jesus dies. Only then can Jesus’ message flourish.

Jesus then says something totally outside logic and our instinct for self-preservation. Those who love life will lose it. Those who hate their life will have eternal life. Again, I think what Jesus was saying, not literally, is that we are to live our lives with a goal of eternal life and not with a goal of living life to its fullest or hedonistically.

Jesus is trying to give Andrew and Phillip eternal lessons, one more time. Jesus knows his time on this earth is short. His disciples are still not clear on what Jesus is about, but Jesus hasn’t given up on them. Jesus could ask to be spared from what will soon happen to him. But he knows that that is why he came to the world. His demise is part of his mission.

Anyone who serves Jesus must follow him. Wherever Jesus is, the servant will also be. If we serve Christ, we will one day be with Christ. God will honor anyone who serves Jesus.

Jesus confesses that his soul is troubled. Jesus knows how he will die and it not by an assassin's blade. Nobody in her or his right mind would be willing be crucified. Jesus is aware of the agony that awaits him and he is rightly apprehensive.

Jesus seems to be arguing with himself out loud. Should he ask God to forget the whole thing and prevent this horror from happening? No. Jesus is in Jerusalem to face the cross. The grain of wheat must die to flourish.

Jesus says, "Father, glorify your name." God responds from the heavens, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." (John 12:28b) The crowd around Jesus, Andrew, and Philip heard the voice. It was so unexpected and out of line with nature that many thought it was thunder. Others said an angel was talking to Jesus.

Jesus corrected them. The voice came for their sake, not for Jesus'. The time of judgement for the world was right then. The ruler of the world will be driven out.

When Jesus is lifted up from the earth, he will draw the whole world to himself. This tells the crowd how Jesus will die. When the Romans lift Jesus on the cross, the whole world will come to Jesus. We are drawn to God only through the cross. Without the cross, nothing else makes sense of Jesus' ministry.

According to John, Jesus takes his throne on the cross and judges the world. What Jesus is judging is a world that embodies domination, violence, and death. This is the world that is represented by the Roman Empire. Unfortunately, these things didn't die when Jesus died. They didn't die when the Roman Empire died. They continued and we still see them today. When those things die, Jesus' kingdom will come.

Whenever anyone uses power over another, there will be judgment. Whenever anyone harms another person, there will be judgment. Whenever

anyone dies, there will be judgment. Jesus went to the cross without a fight. Jesus died on the cross to expose the ugliness of the world. We, as Jesus' followers, are called to expose the ugliness of the world so that the world can be redeemed.

This means that silence is not an option. We cannot accept conditions in our localities, state, and nation when love is not the standard. Like on *The Body Snatchers* movie, we are to point and screech. Jesus passively succumbed to a violent empire. We are to reject violence and hate. We cannot use violence to meet violence. Our voices shall not be silenced.

Text: **John 12:20–33** (NRSV)

²⁰ Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks.

²¹ They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” ²² Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³ Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

²⁴ Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵ Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

²⁷ “Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.”

²⁹ The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” ³⁰ Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not for mine.

³¹ Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out.

³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people^e to myself.” ³³ He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die. ¹

^c Other ancient authorities read *all things*#

¹ [The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version](#). (1989). (Jn 12:20–33). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.