

“Faith Matters” – # 20 – Undoing Violence – September 10, 2017

One of the most astonishing things in the Bible concerns something that did not happen. Even more astonishing is that the Bible makes no mention that it did not take place. What did not happen was vengeance taken by Jesus after his resurrection, revenge against the Romans and the Temple authorities who were responsible for his torture and death on the cross. Instead, he walked to Emmaus with two followers, and later, ate fish with his disciples by the lake. Then, his ascension, but no revenge.

And most astonishing is that few people either in or out of the church realize that by refusing to take revenge, Jesus breaks apart forever the endless cycle of violence. He was practising what he had preached: “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you... Do to others as you would have them do to you” (Luke 6:27, 31).

His refusal to respond to hate with hate, his not returning violence with violence was absolutely revolutionary in a world that passed on vengeance for years, for centuries even. In today’s world of neo-Nazis, white supremacists, and extreme Islamists, Jesus’ teaching and example are huge challenges for us all.

The prophet Isaiah promises hope for our angry world, declaring: “Violence shall no more be heard in your land, devastation or destruction within your borders; you shall call your walls Salvation and your gates Praise” (Isaiah 60:18). The more people there are to follow Jesus’ example and break the cycles of violence, the more hope there is that Isaiah’s words will come true worldwide, and that Jesus will not have died in vain. Can we practise what he preached, and not do what he did not do?

(by Rev. Willard Pottinger, Erskine Presbyterian Church, Hamilton)

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