

WE BECOME WHAT WE HATE

“We become what we hate.”

In this dramatic reading of the passion of Jesus, we see this painful truth illustrated a number of times. We become what we hate. We have just been part of an angry crowd, crying “Crucify him, crucify him,” stirred up by the chief priests and rulers of the people, who wanted to get rid of Jesus. Jesus had come among them in peace -- as a teacher and preacher and healer, announcing the Good News of the coming of the kingdom of God into our world. But the chief priests and rulers of the people saw Jesus as a threat to their earthly kingdom, so the people sunk to their level, going out to get Jesus with swords and clubs, as if he were a robber.

Even the disciples, who had been with Jesus, eating the Passover meal and talking with him, quickly reacted to the violent crowd with their own violence, drawing a sword and trying to cut off someone’s ear.

Judas, who as one of the disciples had been with Jesus and knew very well Jesus’ ministry of peace and compassion, but who seemed frustrated by Jesus’ apparent ineffectiveness in accomplishing anything, betrayed his Master with a kiss.

The soldiers, convinced that Jesus was mad and had claimed to be an earthly king, put a robe on him and a crown of thorns on his head, and knelt before him and mocked him and spat upon him. The lovely meal with Jesus and his friends had suddenly taken a violent turn.

We tend to become what we hate. There’s a very great truth in that, one of the most profound and difficult truths in scripture. Psychologist Carl Jung was scripturally sound when he said, “You always become the thing you fight the most,” and we’ve done everything in our power to prove him correct.

The very act of hating someone draws us to them, and we invariably respond on the terms of the other. Think of someone you really have trouble with, someone you dislike or think of as opposed to your views. A personal relationship, or maybe a political one. Don’t

you become obsessed with that person? Doesn't that person invariably 'push your button', so that you end up responding on his or her terms, rather than on your own?

Yesterday hundreds of thousands of young people around the world marched to say loud and clear that we want to stop gun violence. But the reaction of some people is to talk about giving teachers guns. Can you imagine the chaos and bloodshed in a classroom when a madman with a gun bursts in, and the poor teacher is fumbling for a gun?

We wish to stop murder from being committed, so we execute murderers, becoming murderers ourselves.

We try to stop our children from fighting, by yelling at them. I remember back in the Vietnam War we talked about having to destroy the village in order to save it.

The politicians and religious leaders who are so obsessed with fighting against the sins of the flesh, lust and greed, succumb to them themselves and are ruined.

We want to live in peace, so we keep building up our weapons and our armed forces. But as Jesus said, "All who take the sword will die by the sword." Instead we become what we hate.

That's not the way of Jesus. Jesus says, "Do not resist one who is evil." That does not mean 'be submissive, like a doormat.' What the Greek really means is: "Do not respond to evil by evil means." "Do not resist an evil by letting the evil itself dictate the terms of your response." If someone cuts you off on the freeway, don't lean on your horn and zip around him and cut him off. Break the vicious cycle by letting him go on his stupid way, and ignoring him.

If I'm having a disagreement with someone, I don't accomplish anything either by avoiding the issue altogether, or by wading in with all guns blazing, becoming what it is that I hate. By accepting the disagreement, seeking mutual areas of accord, and working through it in the Spirit of Jesus usually something productive emerges.

Jesus in his own life disavowed violence as well as passive submission, and waded into the hostility of Jerusalem, setting simple truth against force, embracing his enemies rather than becoming like them. The authorities tried to get rid of him by their ultimate deterrent, death, only to find the cross becoming the symbol of new life and liberation.

The lesson of non-violence and embracing the evil is exemplified by Jesus, Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr, Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu. It may lead to the cross, but then ultimately it leads to resurrection.

The movement that should have died on Calvary in 30 AD became a world religion, a pouring out of new life as Jesus triumphed as our Savior. Today the life and teachings of Jesus beam out across the centuries and around the world. We may become what we hate, but God's love is stronger even than death.