

- × The Men's Group met, as it always does, this Friday morning,
  - ✓ And the topic that Professor Tom brought to the group was on gun violence...an appropriate subject for the violence of Good Friday.
    - And as ever, we didn't arrive at a complete answer, just more questions
  - ✓ And Good Friday is like that...it's a day when I have no answers, just questions.
- × Good Friday, with its scourging and crowning with thorns and spitting and slapping and beatings and crucifixions (times three), with its raw demonstration about how the Roman Empire used its power
  - ✓ It's the time of year when I reflect on a couple of conversations I had about how we as a nation use our power:
  - ✓ The first is one I had with one of my Kiwanis pals as we were driving the truck around town.
    - This was just at the time when the pictures from Abu Gharaib had been released and we were being told a little about some of the torture we were inflicting on the Talibanis.
    - He said that we have no choice; we have to torture; it was necessary for law and order. For the integrity and stability of the country. To keep our children safe.
    - I said that this wasn't something I found in the Bible as I read it, but he reckoned that this went beyond the Bible in importance.
  - ✓ An earlier conversation was with a group of officers on the Plans and Policies Division of the Joint Staff at the tail end of the Elder Bush administration & beginning of the Clinton administration, as we were discussing the use of power.
    - I noted that given our limited resources it made sense that we would only deploy our armed forces when grave national interests were at stake
    - But, at the same time, it seemed that we also had the obligation to use our forces in support of human rights that were being abused by a repressive regime.
      - The consensus of the group: "We only care about human rights when it is in our own national interests."
      - Fortunately, 6 years later, we were deployed, not to protect our interests, but the lives of Yugoslavians who were being slaughtered by Milosevic and his cronies.
- × How did we come to this?
  - ✓ How did we become so fascinated with power and our fear of losing power?
  - ✓ How did we come to the point where we could burn 75,000 people to death in one evening of fire bombing over Tokyo? Or kill 45,000 people with one bomb over Nagasaki? Not to mention what's gone on in all the wars since.
- × We as Christians didn't start that way.

- ✓ For the first three centuries after the death of Jesus, the church seems have been a pacifist church.
  - The most clear and unambiguous teaching of Jesus was the rejection of violence and the love of enemies.
    - We were supposed to take this seriously.
- ✓ And we have these great stories like that of Martin of Tours
  - The soldier in the Roman army who cut his cloak in half to give to a beggar on the road,
  - Who converted to Christianity and presented himself to his superiors and asked for a discharge from the army,
    - “I am a soldier of Christ, and it is not lawful for me to fight.”
    - Lots of complications arose from that
- × But the message became garbled when Constantine gave approval to the church
  - ✓ And with that the Church accepted the ethic of a just war
  - ✓ And Christians became involved in war,
    - First for the state and then, for the faith
  - ✓ And over time, all of the major branches of Christianity modified Jesus’ teachings, and—over time—all three were able to justify doing what Jesus rejected:
    - Engage in revenge, murder, the pursuit of power,
      - All in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- × And, Jesus Christ help me, I bought into it.
  - ✓ For 1,700 years the Catholic Church had refined and enhanced the Just War theory to the point where I never questioned whether or not this would result in anything other than the never-ending cycle of violence
- × How can we escape this cycle of violence?
  - ✓ One suggestion was made by Fr. George Zabelka, who served as a Catholic chaplain with the Army Air Force during WWII at Tinian Island, as the pastor for the men who dropped the atomic bomb.
    - Fr. Zabelka reached the conclusion that the use of violence under any circumstances was incompatible with his understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ.
    - He suggested that, (even though he knew that this proposal was hopelessly out of touch with reality),
      - He proposed (in 1972) that there be an immediate call for an ecumenical council for the specific purpose of clearly declaring that was is totally incompatible with Jesus’ teaching and that Christians cannot and will not engage in or pay for war from this point in history on.
        - ◆ That would, he said, have the effect of putting all nations on this planet under notice that from now all they are going to have to

conduct their mutual slaughter without Christian support, either physical, financial, or spiritual.

- Why should we bother holding ecumenical conclaves about apostolic succession or the meaning of the Eucharist, when what is truly destroying the church's credibility and God's world is the continued participation of Christians in and their justification of violence and slaughter
- × I would like to buy into that,
  - ✓ But I can't
    - Because I agree with Fr. Zabelka that this entire concept is out of touch with reality as we know it.
    - The world will never change
- × And that is my biggest sin: the sin of pride
  - ✓ That is, I think I know better than God
  - ✓ That is, it is my way of saying: "God does not have the power to change this world!"
  - ✓ And what a dark and dangerous thought that is, far darker than death.
    - My God, my God, why have you forsaken us to live
      - in a world that cannot be changed?
      - in a world that cannot come to life?
- × And that is the world of Good Friday,
  - ✓ That is the world in which we find the disciples cowering in fear behind locked doors after the crucifixion of Jesus,
    - Locked behind closed doors after the death of the person in whom they had placed all their hopes.
- × But what the disciples failed to realize at that time is that God is greater than their imaginations.
  - ✓ And even though Jesus had always surprised them: healing the sick, calming a storm, curing the blind, raising the dead,
    - They should have expected the unexpected.
      - But they didn't.
- × And how often do I live in a Good Friday world?
  - ✓ Despite the fact that I see miracles in my life and have seen God's actions in Anacortes,
  - ✓ I often forget that I am dealing with a living God
    - The same God whose angel said to Mary at the annunciation, "Nothing will be impossible with God."
- × What is impossible for men and women is quite possible for God if only people would use their freedom to work, even just a little, with God.
  - ✓ Who knows what would happen if the Pope, the patriarch of Constantinople, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Presiding Bishop and the president of the World Council of Churches and the President of the Southern Baptist

Convention called for one voice for a council on ending Christians support of war?

- ✓ Who knows what would happen if we were to call for such a thing?
- ✗ Would Jesus be happy if his church were again unequivocally teaching in the 21<sup>st</sup> century what he unequivocally taught in the 1<sup>st</sup>?
- ✓ We all know, deep in our hearts, what the answer would be.