

LELC Lent 2

Last week - my childhood, this week – my kid’s childhood... (disclaimer: they are reasonably well-adjusted despite all)

I don’t know how it might have been in your household, but in ours, when our kids were little, it was tiresome always to be saying “No” so sometimes we just got “creative.” So, for instance, at Easter when, as pastor’s kids, there was just too much to do to have an Easter Egg hunt in the morning, we just told our kids that the Easter Bunny delivered eggs alphabetically and so we wouldn’t have eggs to hunt until after afternoon naps. Or... we told our kids that wasn’t it nice that someone just wanted to be nice so they drove a music truck around the neighborhood so we could hear the happy music. (Darned little kid named Evan next door was the spoiler on that one).

But the biggie, the consequential one, was that we never ever watched anything but PBS when the kids were around. We got news from the radio. So as far as our kids knew there was only PBS with its Sesame Street and Mr. Rogers, Julia Child and the Frugal Gourmet, and the Art Guy. We were not too keen on most other children’s programming, so we just never let on that there was any. That worked okay until one fateful day when one of the kids, I think it was Karl, spent an afternoon after school with a friend. He came home to tell us the most amazing news: there were other channels that a person could get on the TV.

That lead to a conversation about us not wanting them to see so much violence as little kids. Even if it was just the Coyote bonking the Road Runner, we didn’t want them to be seeing so much bonking, zapping, and zonking. It would become something they would learn even without thinking, kind of the way they learned their ABC’s, by singing the ABC song over and over. The violence of cartoons, and other shows for that matter, would just be something they learned without thinking. We did let them start to watch other shows, but the test of the show was whether or not it had “bad ABC’s.” Did the people of the show solve their problem with something other than violence? Other than hitting the hardest or knocking someone out? There weren’t that many shows that met that test. One called Planeteers was a favorite.

So, years after all that, when I read Walter Wink’s discussion of the myth of redemptive violence in his landmark book, “The Powers that Be” I understood implicitly what he was getting at. And I call it the lie of redemptive violence: the

battle with one another through their armies and navies. Today, more and more, individuals and loosely-associated groups of individuals, (who find each other often as not through the wonder of the internet) are taking matters into their own hands. In misguided efforts to solve their perceived problems, they seek out and attempt to destroy the “Other” that they believe (and are often lead to believe) to be the cause of their problem. (And, I might add, they fully and firmly believe themselves to be the good guys for doing it.) The massacre in the mosques in ChristChurch, New Zealand is only the most recent and attention-grabbing example. They will, no doubt, not be the last. We are endlessly, hopelessly, addicted to this lie that violence is okay if it is “us good guys” against “those bad guys.”

But what then do we do with the words Jesus says next? “How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings...” A hen? I’m not gonna lie – that is not exactly the most awe-inspiring image. A homely mama chicken. What can a hen do to protect her chicks from any serious kind of predator? Nothing. Or next to it anyway. The hen protects her chicks with her own body. Her very self. Those chicks are protected only by her love, her devotion, her maternal instincts, and all the strength of about ~~five~~ ⁷ pounds of feathers and fury.

I’ll admit it, part of me wants to say, “Come on, Jesus. Haven’t you got anything better than that?!” An eagle? A Lion? A mama bear, perhaps? But I believe this image, followed as it is by his journey to Jerusalem, where his actions and choices lead him to death on a cross, are a complete repudiation of the lie of redemptive violence. It is an utter repudiation of the idea that we can solve our problems, secure our well-beings by the destruction of anyone else, even our “enemy.”

With this image, Jesus invites us instead to be one of the chicks gathered by the Mother Hen, the Mother Hen who will give her own life to protect her little one. It is the epitome of what I have come to call redemptive suffering – suffering freely chosen for the sake of another. It is what Jesus did, freely choosing the suffering of the cross, a complete repudiation of violence, thereby defeating the forces of evil: sin, the Devil, and the fear of death. → Evident in story/movie/... Aslan in Narnia; Lilly in Harry P.

Think about that hen just a bit. What difference does it make to her chicks to be gathered? They find themselves gathered under her wings, sheltered, and unafraid. Maybe that is what God most wants for us: that we not be so afraid. Maybe that’s because God knows fear makes us stupid; fear makes us hateful; fear makes us willing to resort to hateful and inhuman things.

Early Christians took this repudication of violence so seriously they were pacifists. Love the only way. Held until Constantine, Christianity - Emperor's hand.

But so often we will not be gathered into God's care and protection. And our house is left to us. Our mess of a world just gets messier and messier. But that is not God's intent for us, not God's desire for us. God's desire is to gather us, care for us, protect us, and free us from fear.

In these days when the foxes of the world have us all either paralyzed into impotent inaction or frenzied into thoughtless, hateful action; it would be a powerful first step to let ourselves be gathered under God's wings, to let ourselves be so surrounded and sheltered by the power of God's love that we could face the forces that seek destruction unafraid and filled with world-transforming love. It is my prayer for myself, and for you, and for all who follow this mothering hen Lord of love. May it be so. Amen.