

biblestudy: august 2022

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Based on the scripture lessons of Cokesbury's Adult Bible Study Series

August 7, 2022 Text: 1 Chronicles 22:6-10, 17-19 “Violence is not God’s First Choice”

If you were planning a great lifetime project and could choose between two developers of the project, would you look to someone young and inexperienced or would you prefer someone with a proven track record? Why would I risk trusting my dream undertaking to a builder who has never done anything special?

David wanted to build a great [“magnificent, famous, glorified” temple (1 Chronicles 22:5)] but he turns the construction over to his “young and inexperienced” (1 Chronicles 5:5) son, Solomon. Why would anyone do that?

David did that because God told him to do so. God wanted the temple to be defined by peace and David had been a ferocious warrior (1 Chronicles 22:8). God does not make judgments by the same standards as we do.

Even though war and enmity are not God’s preferred tools for life, God is still able to use our mistakes to achieve God’s purposes. David acknowledges that the land now belongs to God’s people because God has used David’s misguided violence (1 Chronicles 22:18).

This is not to say that God does not care how we go about our lives; it does say that God can use even our mistaken attempts. Even my brokenness can be an instrument for God’s purposes. After all, this is the

God who turned a cross into an empty tomb!

I bring my mistakes to God and say, “Lord, can we start again?”

I bring my uncertain relationships to the Lord and say, “Grace-giver, give a new beginning.”

I bring my sin-cluttered journey and say, “Forgive me and move me to a new path.”

There are many great, famous moments in the life of King David, but perhaps none is more grace-packed than this one in which he releases his errors into God’s redemptive hands.

What Someone Else Has Said:

In the Charles P. Frank novel *Digging Through Time* (iUniverse), one character says to another, “As long as this blustery weather keeps up, you best get a change of scenery. Sometimes when folks get seasick, it helps calm a queasy stomach to look off at the horizon. Why don’t you come with me?”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “O Lord, move me from wrong places to places of Your purposes...”

August 14, 2022 Text: Matthew 5:9, 38-48 “Building a Fence Around Violence”

United Methodists often talk about the gift of Christian perfection (maturity, completeness). What we often forget is that the context for Jesus’ call to perfection is our Lord’s appeal for love of enemies (Matthew 5:43-48). That’s a pretty high standard for perfection!

The world so often seems divided into “us” and “them.” Jesus does not deny that such brokenness occurs. He speaks openly that we have enemies (v. 44), that there are unrighteous (v. 45), that there is evil (v. 44), that there is a tendency to love only our own (v. 46). Jesus lives in the real world!

The “violence” referenced in the title to this lesson is more than physical battle. There is emotional violence, forcing others to their lesser selves. There is mental violence, creating barriers to truth thinking. There is relational violence, stirring negative attitude toward another. There is spiritual violence, using our faith as a weapon. And, of course, there is indeed physical violence, power expressed in bullets and differences shown with a fist.

When Jesus says “to love your enemies,” he uses the word that gets translated into Greek as *agape*. That kind of love contrasts with brotherly love and erotic love. *Agape* is undeserved caring, undeserved pat-

ience, undeserved compassion. Such love indeed “builds a fence” around physical, emotional, mental, relational, and spiritual violence.

I checked the small print. Nowhere does Jesus say that this will be easy. I checked the small print again. Nowhere does Jesus say that we should not even try just because it is difficult to love with *agape*.

In Matthew 5:9, Jesus refers to “peacemakers.” That term implies that the call is to something more than just being peaceful; it is an invitation to take the initiative in doing the things that make for peace. It is the challenge of doing something, saying something. It is an “action word.”

Where are the places in my life where I need to be a peacemaker? Where are the places in my life that need *agape*?

What Someone Else Has Said:

In *The Christian Art of Dying* (Eerdmans Publishing), Allen Verhey has written: “God’s love for the sinner is the basis and prototype for human love of the neighbor.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Loving God, teach me to love...”

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August 21, 2022 Text: Ephesians 2:11-22 “Love Your Enemy”

Last November, I had an appointment to consult with someone at a church office building. She sent me an email, advising me to call her when I arrived so she could unlock the front door, “because the building is still closed to visitors.” Of course, I recognized that such a precaution was an effort to be safe from coronavirus, but it set me to wondering: Are there ways in which we close the faith journey to others?

In this focal text (Ephesians 2:11-22), the point of separation is the line between Jew and Gentile. Today, even in the faith community, we sometimes divide up by race, by sexual orientation, by financial security, by age, by political view, and by many other labels. Does oneness in Christ mean that we cannot disagree with one another? Paul reminds us that we may not think alike, but we are shaped in Christ Jesus to love alike.

Here is the way John Wesley put it in his sermon “Catholic Spirit”: “Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without all doubt, we may. Herein all the children of God may unite, notwithstanding these smaller differences.”

Paul says that Christ is our “peace” (Ephesians 2:14). Paul writes that Christ came to proclaim “peace” to those nearby and those far off (Ephesians 2:17). The apostle says that Christ has made “peace” by

August 28, 2022 Text: Matthew 26:47-56 “Letting Go of Violent Revolution”

I’m not sure that Mrs. Dellinger did me a favor. She was teaching my Sunday School class when I was in elementary school. Someone asked her, “How do I decide what is the right thing to do?” She said, “Use Jesus as an example. Jesus shows us how God wants things to be done.”

That bit of advice certainly puts a crimp in how I think things ought to be done. What would Jesus do? What would Jesus have me do? (Or what would Jesus not do and what would Jesus have me not do?)

This week’s focal text is a case in point. Jesus calls his betrayer “friend” (Matthew 26:50). When Peter whacks off the ear of a perceived enemy, Jesus tells him to put away the sword (Matthew 26:52). When the attackers showed up with swords and clubs, Jesus asked them why they thought they needed that to arrest a peaceful man (Matthew 26:47, 55). Is this the Jesus I want to show me how to react to enemies? Is this the Jesus I want to tell me how to treat those who don’t agree with me? Is this the Jesus I want to demonstrate how to handle troublesome relationships?

I guess this is an example of “Be careful what you pray for.”

The truth is that sometimes my spirit is violent even when my actions are not.

putting together one humanity rather than two. Paul chooses the word *eirēnē* when he speaks of “peace.” That word in New Testament language comes from a word that means “to join.” Joined, rather than separated! Love is able to join when life’s journey might separate.

Here’s an idea. I think I’ll print out Ephesians 2:11-22 and the next time I get angry with someone or get bent out of shape by another’s views or decide somebody is outside the fold of God’s care, I’ll read those verses and start to love the other person. Or, maybe I’ll just keep on choosing up sides. Which do you think I’ll do?

What Someone Else Has Said:

John B. Cobb, Jr., (*Grace and Responsibility*, Abingdon Press) has written: “(John Wesley) contrasted this shared love with all of those doctrines, forms of church governance, forms of worship, and views of the sacraments, that in fact divided Christians and led to mutual animosities...But this is no reason to reject fellowship with those who identify with other Christian groups. What is essential is Christian love and that alone.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Fill me with love, O God, and let it overflow into the lives of others I meet...”

I may keep my outburst under control, but in my inner spirit there is still a rumbling of anger or distrust or attack. Jesus is transparent; His behavior matches what His Spirit is offering.

Violence begets violence (Matthew 26:52). Violence seldom proves who is right; it only proves who is stronger. This lesson is not easy to hear. Notice how this week’s focal text ends: the disciples desert Jesus and run away (Matthew 26:56). No doubt they had figured that when push came to shove, Jesus would erupt with violent resistance. What about the “twelve legions of angels” (Matthew 26:53)? If ever there was to be a time for Jesus to call in the troops, this was it. But He doesn’t. And the disciples leave Him.

It’s seventy-five years since Mrs. Dellinger gave me that advice. I’m still working on it.

What Someone Else Has Said:

In a study of the Psalms (*From Whom No Secrets Are Hid*, Westminster John Knox), Walter Brueggemann has written: “We might hope and wish that we could catch up to Jesus and his readiness to forgive. But it is clear that we have not arrived there yet.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “How do I serve You, Lord?...”

QUICK CROSS WORD PUZZLE 1

Across	Down
1 Remorse (10)	1 Take flight (3)
6 Consecrate (6)	2 One of the twelve (6)
7 Break a Commandment (5)	3 All living things (6)
9 Make a hole (6)	4 Response (6)
10 Pot (3)	5 Guardians of Eden (8)
11 What Ai became (4)	6 The father of Levi (8)
14 This initially watered the earth (4)	8 Grow (8)
15 Samuel’s mentor (3)	9 Forbearance (8)
16 Small river (6)	12 Second longest book (6)
17 Mount that Moses climbed (5)	13 Statue metal (6)
18 Prophet in David’s time (6)	14 Sister of Lazarus and Mary (6)
20 Biblical garden (10)	19 Wood splitter (3)

Puzzle courtesy of Bible Puzzles.com

