Recovering the Doctrine of Gospel Nonviolence: Jesus, the Sermon on the Mount, and Pope Leo's Call for an Unarmed and Disarming Peace

By Rev. John Dear

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The night before he was killed Dr. King said "the choice is no longer violence or nonviolence; it's nonviolence or non-existence." Thank you so much for choosing nonviolence, rising to the occasion, and being the people who help lead us all back from the brink of global destruction and helping the church recover Gospel nonviolence and encouraging humanity to adopt nonviolence.

It's exciting that with Pope Francis and Pope Leo, we have an opening, that peace is possible, as Archbishop Bo of Myanmar said yesterday, that a new nonviolent church, even a new nonviolent future is possible. With nonviolence, we can have as Pope Leo says, an unarmed and disarming peace, even an unarmed and disarming church. With the recovery of Gospel nonviolence, we can have a new theology of nonviolence and a new spirituality of nonviolence, so that perhaps for the first time since the fourth century, we are learning that Jesus is nonviolent, that God is nonviolent, that to be human is to be nonviolent, that the days of violence must come to an end, that with Jesus' "unarmed and disarming peace" from the Sermon on the Mount to the Cross to the empty tomb, we can become who we were created to be--peacemakers, the beloved sons and daughters of the God of peace.

For my little part, I would like to offer three points for our reflection today and encouragements for the work ahead.

First, I invite us to ask for and accept the grace to become apostles of Gospel nonviolence, that is apostles of the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5-7, and to form and train apostles of the Sermon on the Mount to teach, organize and mobilize everyone to live, practice and proclaim Gospel nonviolence everywhere. By this I mean, to realize that we are being sent out personally by the nonviolent Jesus on an apostolic work, from this gathering to tell the world that Jesus is totally nonviolent, and that anyone anywhere who claims to be a Christian or a Catholic from now on has to put down the sword, disarm, and practice unarmed active creative Gospel nonviolence like Jesus. Pope Francis and Pope Leo have charged us with this apostolic work, and we're invited to make it come true, to make nonviolent disciples of all the nations, so that we might all accept his gift of an "unarmed and disarming peace."

I hear Pope Leo saying over and over again that we must "educate the church and the world about Gospel nonviolence." How do we do that? I invite us to talk about the Sermon on the Mount from now on! To start promoting it as if it's a long-lost text, a treasure map, Einstein's theory of relativity, or as Dr. King said, the only practical, political solution left for humanity, which it is. I say this because this is what Gandhi did, and what Dr. King and Dorothy Day did. For hundreds of years the church always began by talking about the cross and the death of Jesus. I'm not sure that is the best approach, especially in this time of radical individualism. Tolstoy learned from the Abolitionists to start with the Sermon on the Mount, and he taught Gandhi

that, and so Gandhi read from the Sermon on the Mount every day for the last 45 years of his life, and then proclaimed the Sermon on the Mount to the world through active nonviolence and people power movements. This has to become the new norm in the church.

One way to understand our work is to see it as a global campaign within the church to promote, read, study and live the Sermon on the Mount as the doorway into Gospel nonviolence and Pope Leo's vision of an unarmed and disarming peace. Unlike the rest of us, Gandhi did not read it like nice pious platitudes or sacred poetry or some obscure beautiful teachings. He read it as a manual of directions, as a handbook on how to be a human being, how to be nonviolent, and he decided to follow the directions and do what the poor guy said, whether he wanted to or not, whether he understood it or not. By doing this he became Gandhi, and realized that these teachings were not intended just for individual use but for every nation and the whole world. The Sermon on the Mount is the blueprint for a new life of nonviolence, a new church of nonviolence and a new world of nonviolence. It is the path and direction for an unarmed and disarming peace.

Perhaps our best model for this is the great Dorothy Day, founder of the Catholic Worker who will soon be beatified, who consistently, persistently, tirelessly condemned every war throughout her entire life, even when every bishop, cardinal, pope, and priest supported war. As World War II began, Dorothy announced that the paper would maintain its pacifist stand. Then a week after Pearl Harbor in December 1941, she wrote an open letter to the Catholic Worker houses and published it in the paper with a big bold shocking headline: "Our manifesto is the Sermon on the Mount." No one had done that before, but imagine doing that in the US empire a week after Pearl Harbor!

This needs to be our message, the manifesto of every church, Christian university and publication and platform from now on. Our manifesto is the Sermon on the Mount.

Here's what she wrote: "We will print the words of Christ who is with us always – 'Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who persecute you.' We are at war, a declared war with Japan, Germany and Italy. But still, we repeat Christ's word each day, holding them close in our hearts and each month printing them in the paper. In times past, Europe has been a battlefield. But let us remember St. Francis who spoke of peace. We will go on printing articles which remind us that we are all called to be saints, that we are other Christs. Our manifesto is the Sermon on the Mount which means that we try to be peacemakers. We will not participate in armed warfare, or in making weapons. We will try daily, hourly, to pray for an end to war."

Few people in history have taken the Sermon on the Mount as seriously as Gandhi and Dorothy Day did. Tens of thousands of subscriptions were canceled and overnight 30 houses closed. This is why I consider her one of our greatest saints. She should be named a doctor of the church. From now on, we live by her headline and we proclaim her headline: "Our manifesto is the Sermon on the Mount."

This is what I have been trying to do with "The Nonviolent Jesus Podcast," the Beatitudes Center for the Nonviolent Jesus, and recent books like *The Gospel of Peace* and *Universal Love*.

For me, there are several key lines that I have focused on over the last 45 years, which I invite us to cite and proclaim from the rooftops, or better yet, to organize as a strategic global campaign, a way to teach Gospel nonviolence around the world and move toward an "unarmed and disarming peace." I invite us to quote the actual words of Jesus from now on and help raise them into a new global conversation:

"Blessed are the peacemakers; they will be called the sons and daughters of the God of peace." "You have heard it said, thou shalt not kill; but I say to you, do not even get angry at another. Instead, go be reconciled." And the foundational teaching (Matthew 5:39): "You have heard it said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth' but I say to you: 'Offer no violent resistance to one who does evil.'" In the face of violence, the world has said there are only two options: respond with violence, or do nothing, be passive and run away. Jesus offers a third option: active creative nonviolent resistance that does not run away, but stands its ground and uses creative love to disarm the opponent without using the violent means of the opponent. It trusts in God and lets God use us to disarm others through us, through our unarmed, disarming, nonviolent, suffering love. Gandhi proved this methodology can work on a national level and global level.

Then the climax (Matthew 5:43): "You have heard it said, love your countrymen and hate your enemies, but I say love your enemies and pray for your persecutors then you will be sons and daughters of the God who lets the sun rise on the good and the bad and the rain to fall on the just and the unjust." Notice he does not say: "However, if they are really bad, and you follow these seven conditions, bomb the hell out of them." Notice too that in this the most political sentence in the entire bible, which not only outlaws war and killing and the whole nation state system and commands universal nonviolent love, we get the best description in the entire Bible about the nature of God, which is the scandal of Jesus, the scandal of the Gospel, the heart of our apostolic work – the announcement that the living God is totally nonviolent, a God of universal love, compassion and peace, that is, the living God of universal nonviolence. Here again he calls us to our true identity: if you practice universal nonviolent love, then you will really be the beloved sons and daughters of the God of universal nonviolent love. He wants us to become who we were created to be, people of unarmed and disarming peace, the beloved sons and daughters of the God of universal love and peace.

Second, I invite us to ask for and welcome the grace to become missionaries of Gospel nonviolence, that is, to be Luke 10 movement organizers, like the nonviolent Jesus, to enter and reclaim and take up Luke 10 where Jesus sends out 72 disciples on a campaign of nonviolence, that we carry on his campaign of Gospel nonviolence by strategically training and sending out 100 people who will train 100 people who will train another 100 people, so that Jesus' global campaign of Gospel nonviolence will become contagious and spread like holy Pentecostal wildfire across the earth in a new global grassroots bottom up people power movement of active Gospel nonviolence, the likes of which the world has never seen, way beyond the

abolitionists and suffragists, beyond Gandhi and Dr. King, to dismantle empire, fascism, corporate greed, the military industrial complex, white supremacy, nuclear weapons, fossil fuels, and spend the world's trillions to cut the roots of war in poverty and injustice.

As we face the horrors of the world, I find the Luke 10 movement of grassroots nonviolence to be a way out, a way through and a way forward. Jesus organizes a nonviolent military campaign just like Gandhi's Salt March and Dr. King in Birmingham. He sends 72 people ahead of him in pairs, saying, "I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves." He forms an illegal, underground, empowered, grassroots people power movement of apostles and missionaries of nonviolence, and I think we could revive Luke 10 as a holy path forward to sow seeds for an unarmed and disarming peace.

If we follow the actual text of Luke 10, and start asking Christians around the world to study Luke 10 and build local, regional and national nonviolent movements based on Luke 10, we can carry on Jesus' Luke 10 campaign of nonviolence today. We will train one another to do several key things – send one another as lambs, as people of Gospel nonviolence, into a world of wolves, of total violence and war; to announce this unarmed and disarming peace near and far; to heal all victims of violence and war; to expel all the demons of violence and war, and liberate everyone; and to proclaim God's reign of peace and nonviolence in a new way – as a new world without war, poverty, racism, greed, violence, injustice, nuclear weapons and environmental destruction. Like our ancestors the holy abolitionists who dared to announce the abolition of slavery and a new world of human equality, we dare to announce the abolition of war, nuclear weapons and systemic injustice, and the coming of a new world of nonviolence, of "an unarmed and disarming peace," God's reign of universal love and peace on earth.

This is an apostolic work because we are preparing good soil and sowing seeds of peace for a future harvest of disarmament, justice and peace that we will not live to see, that the outcome is in God's hands; that we're only asked to do our part, to carry on the campaign, the vision, the proclamation of Gospel nonviolence and do our part in God's plan of nonviolence and take our place in God's lineage of peacemakers down through history.

On the concrete level, we have to send one another out to meet with every priest and bishop in the world, and every parish in the world with this call for a new unarmed and disarming peacemaking church, to teach everyone that Jesus was totally nonviolent, and we need to become nonviolent too, so that no one has guns, no one supports war, no one builds nuclear weapons, no one sends their kids off to war, no one gets killed in war. We have to train everyone in Gospel nonviolence. Every Catholic parish, school and university needs to become a training camp of Gospel nonviolence. In particular, we beg our church leaders to require that Gospel nonviolence be taught in every seminary in the world, to put Gospel nonviolence into the creed and the prayers of the Mass, as well as the Catechism and Canon law. And Holy Father Pope Leo, if you hear this or read this, please give the world a gift of a new encyclical on Jesus, peace and nonviolence, maybe even a new Third Vatican Council on Jesus, peace and nonviolence.

That means, as we live out Luke 10, and organize new Luke 10 movements around the world, we are also becoming fearless prophets of nonviolence, of the nonviolent Jesus, of God's unarmed and disarming peace. Jesus is sending out a new generation of prophetic people of Gospel nonviolence to every nation, to speak out and mobilize for God's reign as the coming of a new world nonviolence. I invite us to organize local, regional and national conferences like this which will teach people to speak out publicly, boldly, prophetically, who will then build grassroots movements for justice, disarmament and creation.

Please remember the end of Luke 10: they all come back rejoicing, and then Jesus starts rejoicing. He sees Satan (empire) fall like lightning from heaven because empires always begin to collapse when ordinary people start organizing movements. He pledges that no harm will come to us. He declares that we have been given power, the power of Gospel nonviolence. If you are looking for joy, I invite you to get involved in local grassroots movements. This will make us start rejoicing.

But more importantly, this is the only occasion in the four gospels when Jesus rejoices, when he is happy. So, we keep going, building movements of nonviolence, announcing God's reign of universal love and peace, come what may, in the end, just to make the poor guy happy, to help him rejoice.

Third, and finally, we can ask for and welcome the grace, to call the global church all over again to live out and share in the paschal mystery of the nonviolent Jesus as the way to his unarmed and disarming peace. Thirty years ago, when I was in jail facing 20 years in prison for hammering on nuclear weapons, my friend Sr. Joan Chittister wrote me that "the only way to peace and justice is through our participation in the paschal mystery of Jesus." So that's what we are trying to do: help the church once again, as it did in its first century, participate in the paschal mystery of the nonviolent Jesus, that is, in the cross and resurrection of the nonviolent Jesus.

Scripture scholar John Dominic Crossan asked me to tell you that 2,000 years ago the Roman empire gave out medals to people of nonviolence, because they were passively supporting the Pax Romana, the false peace of empire and its militaries and wars. It meant they were passively going along with the culture of empire. That's how we became a warmaking church, by passively accepting war and empire and doing what we're told, whether by an emperor or a fascist US president – as opposed to obeying the nonviolent Jesus. John Dominic Crossan asked me to remind you that the empire killed the nonviolent Jesus because of his nonviolent resistance to the empire. So, we have to help the church around the world to stand up, speak out, and publicly engage in daring, nonviolent resistance to war and empire; not to be passive, afraid, worried, or anxious, but bold in universal love, to go public with nonviolent action for justice and disarmament; to take up the cross as nonviolent resistance to war and injustice and follow the nonviolent Jesus as he goes ahead us, leading us to our own Jerusalems. We have to help each other take up the cross of nonviolent resistance to war and empire.

Shortly after the disciples heard the Sermon on the Mount, they asked Jesus if he wanted them to call down hellfire from heaven on the enemy; it was as if they had heard nothing, he said.

This is what we are facing today. As we proclaim the Sermon on the Mount, church leaders and priests will continue to want to call down hellfire from heaven. But now, they don't even ask Jesus. We call down hellfire all the time because we can, from Hiroshima and Nagasaki, to Vietnam and Central America to Iraq and Afghanistan, to Gaza and Iran. Jesus turned and rebuked those first disciples, and he rebukes us today; he rebukes all cardinals, bishops, priests and lay folk who call down hellfire from heaven, by supporting the troops, our militaries, and wars, including the bombings of Gaza, Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Iran, Ukraine, Congo, and South Sudan. We need to continue to rebuke the so-called just war theory and its latest insane version as "proportional self-defense." Jesus rebukes all of that, marches into Jerusalem, turns over the tables of systemic injustice in an act of nonviolent civil disobedience, and faces immediate arrest, torture and execution. That is the path that we must take.

So, in Gethsemani, as Judas brings 75 armed Roman soldiers and authorities to arrest Jesus, Peter takes up the sword to kill them to protect Jesus, and in a moment rejects everything Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount, and stupidly thinks he can protect Jesus against 75 armed soldiers. Just as he goes to kill, the commandment comes down, "Put down the sword." Dear friends, these are the last words of Jesus to the church, to his community before he was killed; it's the last thing they heard him say; and it's the first time they understand how serious he was about nonviolence, so they all run away and abandon him. Jesus is arrested, mocked and tortured by 600 drunken soldiers, and never once retaliates or even gets angry. He was the bravest, most courageous, most nonviolent person who ever lived. In front of Pilate, Jesus explains everything: "My kingdom does not belong to this world. If my kingdom did belong to this world, my attendants would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Judeans. But as it is, my kingdom is not here." Your world of empire and war uses violence; my world of peace and love uses nonviolence. My attendants are not allowed to fight; they are nonviolent, because I am nonviolent and God is nonviolent and God's reign is a new realm of total nonviolence and universal love.

I was asked to say a word about resurrection and nonviolence. With the resurrection, Jesus continues his global Luke 10 grassroots campaign of nonviolence. Remember, when they killed him and put him in the tomb, the empire put the imperial seal on the rock with the words, in Latin, "We killed you, you're dead, now stay there!" Alas for the empire, he breaks the law, commits civil disobedience, rises and breaks out of the tomb, and starts all over again stirring up good trouble. Resurrection is illegal!

Notice that when he appeared to his friends, he was still perfectly nonviolent. He did not get angry at them for abandoning him, or show any desire for vengeance or retaliation or revenge. He forgives everyone, loves everyone, offers his gift of peace, gives them the holy spirit and then sends them out all over again on the mission, his Luke 10 campaign of grassroots nonviolence, this time to the ends of the earth. This is what Jesus asks us to do: help every Catholic and Christian welcome Jesus' resurrection gift of peace and accept his mission and go forth as apostles, missionaries and prophets of resurrection peace and Gospel nonviolence.

For me, resurrection means having nothing to do with death. There's not a trace or drop of violence or death in the risen Jesus. So, for me, resurrection means total nonviolence. The power of nonviolence leads to resurrection. As followers of the risen nonviolent Jesus, we welcome and breathe in his resurrection gift of peace, we practice, teach and proclaim his way of Gospel nonviolence, we have nothing to do with death, and we go forth to build up and organize his campaign of gospel nonviolence to the ends of the earth. In doing so, we are getting ready for resurrection, entering the new life of resurrection peace this very moment. We get rid of our guns, put down the sword, let go of revenge, retaliation and resentment, refuse to support war, resist militarism, dismantle weapons, surrender our hearts and lives to God, and let God use us for God's "unarmed and disarming peace."

Remember what Dr. King said in Selma the night before the great 1965 march. He announced his definition of church as "the place you go from."

So today, we go forth to sow seeds of resurrection peace for a harvest of resurrection peace that we may not live to see, but it is imperative that we do this; it is the most important thing we can do with our lives. We go forth proclaiming to the ends of the earth, "Our manifesto is the Sermon on the Mount." We go forth to recruit everyone into Jesus' global people power bottom-up Luke 10 grassroots campaign of Gospel nonviolence. We go forth as lambs into the midst of wolves, rebuking all calls for hellfire, telling one another to put down the sword, teaching one another the methodology of Jesus' nonviolence and universal love. We go forth to take up the cross of nonviolent resistance to war and empire; to risk resurrection; to get ready for resurrection, to practice resurrection, to live as if the resurrection is true. From now on we go forth as apostles, missionaries, prophets, teachers, promoters, organizers, heralds, witnesses, champions, and saints of Gospel nonviolence and along the way, become who we are created to be, who we already are, the sons and daughters of the God of peace, peacemakers. Thank you so much. God bless you.

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Rev. John Dear is the author most recently of "The Gospel of Peace: A Commentary on Matthew, Mark and Luke from the Perspective of Nonviolence," and "Universal Love: Surrendering to the God of Peace." He hosts "The Nonviolent Jesus Podcast," and directs www.beatitudescenter.org
See www.johndear.org