

Defending the Realm
Matthew 5:9-13 June 26, 2011

I. So what is your greatest temptation?

A. Is it one of the standards?

1. Chocolate?
2. Are you addicted to speed? Fast
3. Drugs?
4. Sex?
5. Running?

B. Is it one of the venials?

1. Greed
2. Gluttony
3. Wal-Mart

C. A few weeks ago I gave a sermon where I shared Jesus scholar John Dominic Crossan's view that when we say the Lord's Prayer and we say the line, "lead us not into temptation," that we are dealing with a very specific temptation; a temptation that is our greatest temptation and that is the temptation to use violence in the name of God – that is violence to bring about or defend the Realm of God.

- D. One of Crossan's bits of evidence comes from the passage when the disciples begin to use the sword to defend Jesus when the guard came to arrest him and Jesus tells them to put the sword away as those that live by the sword will die by the sword.
- II. So how have Christians done over the years at overcoming this temptation?
- A. 300 years after Jesus, the Emperor Constantine made Christianity legal. Tradition tells us that he was converted to Christianity suddenly, and by a miracle. One evening during the war with Maxentius, he saw a cross appearing in the heavens, with the inscription, "By this thou shalt conquer." And from then on the sword has been used to establish and defend the Christian realm of God.
- B. Violence was the tool for controlling heretics – those who opposed the official teachings of the church.
- C. The Crusades were fought to save the world from the Jews and Muslims and to try to re-establish the seat of God's realm in Jerusalem.

- D. Then of course there was the Inquisition where those who threatened the power and authority of the church were tortured and executed.
 - E. The near genocide of America's indigenous population was done with the blessing of church and in the name of God.
 - F. Women who opposed the religious male power structure were burned as witches.
 - G. And missionaries traveled the world, from those that inspired and accompanied the Spanish conquest of the Americas to the Congregational missionaries who invaded Hawaii, with the understanding that if natives didn't convert it was ok if they died.
 - H. Let's just confess that Christianity does not have a very good history of overcoming the great temptation.
We've been much better at singing "Onward Christian Soldiers."
- III. Enough of pointing the finger at others; what really got me thinking about this was how incredibly bad I am at overcoming this temptation.

- A. No I haven't been attacking people and telling them they must worship God or I'll beat them to a pulp;
but I, or we, probably give in to this temptation more often than you might think.
- B. First let's do a little reflection.
1. As I also mentioned in a previous sermon, we all create our own reality, it is who and what we uniquely are.
Each and every one of us have an idea, a vision, of the way things should be, a construct of what is right and of what is wrong and we are quite aware of how the world and other people differ from our vision, and differ from the way we believe things should be.
 2. This vision of **the way things should be** is our vision of the Realm of God.
 3. So here's the question for each of us,
"Will you use violence to defend your Realm of God?"
- C. Certainly, as Christians, we should look to Jesus and acknowledge that his vision for the Realm of God ought to have a bit more authority when considering the way things should be;
but despite that -- we all still tend to fall back to what we think is right.

1. For instance, if someone marched in here with a gun and was going to take one of the small children as a hostage and one of the parents of this small child just happened that day to packing;
what do you think the odds are that that parent is going to use violence to stop the invaders?
2. I'm guessing that most of us probably would, with an adrenaline high and the terror of the moment, act in a way that might be violent.
3. That certainly was the response of the New Life church's security officer when a few years back a gunman came in and started shooting people.
 - a) I don't recall any condemnation of her actions from any of our good Christian sisters and brothers in the metro area.
 - b) I have no recollection of the Pastor of the church telling the officer to put her gun away, for those that live by the gun will die by the gun.
4. Yet when Jesus was put in that very situation and his disciple pulled his weapons to defend Jesus – Jesus said “No.”
5. I think it is clear from Jesus teachings and his actions that violence even to defend what is right, even to defend the Realm of God, cannot be accomplished through violence.

6. But let's look at some scenarios that are not so life threatening.
- a) Like how we respond to that egomaniac in the Escalade who thinks the whole world revolves around him as he pulls in front of you forcing you to hit the brakes.
 - (1) No, we don't shoot him, but even our instructive gesture is a mild form of violence.
 - (2) And in our imaginations we'd love to slap a little sense into him.
 - (3) 'Cmon, be honest – you really would like to.
 - b) The majority of folks in this state, most of whom would call themselves Christian approved of the right of a person to kill a person who has entered their home to steal their TV or even to just get a drink of water.
 - c) And despite the biblical vision that in God's realm the lion will lay down with the lamb; that yellow jacket flying around in my house -- it's dead meat just as soon as I can kill it; because in my Realm of God, other things that might hurt me don't have a right to be in my world.

- d) For many folks that includes any animals that may be in the way of our human infestation of every inch of the planet.

D. With the yellow jacket maybe I've taken us to the inane, but let's go broader to -- Afghanistan.

1. Long before 9/11, back when I first heard of what the Taliban were doing to women in the region, I wanted out troops to go in then and do to all the Taliban men what they were doing to the women and just for justice of it all do a little procedure we use to create steers.
2. I wanted to establish and protect my view of the Realm of God even if it meant using US troops to do it.
3. In my realm of god I want to use US troops to bring justice and freedom to the world. I want to use the sword to establish my Realm of God.
4. But – WWJD – oh yeah -- Jesus.

- IV. Yeah, what about Jesus and his vision for the Realm of God and his prayer that we might not be tempted?
- A. To be honest with you, that day when Constantine saw the cross in the sky that said “With this you shall conquer;” that was the day Christianity died.
 - B. That was the day when following Jesus’ teachings ended.
 - C. That was the day when we as a church we decided it was OK to use the sword to establish and protect the Realm of God. And that prayer about “lead us not into temptation” was from then on to refer more to eating chocolate and not pulling a Weiner, a la former Congressman Weiner.
- V. The **last and greatest temptation** is the **last and greatest** because from killing the yellow jacket to offering that well deserved insult to funding and authorizing the Dept. of Defense, or even our local police forces; force is used to establish and protect our Realm of God – to protect me.

- A. Sure a least half of us here this morning would really love to be out of Afghanistan and some of you on the principles of pacifism.
- B. But to be really consistent how many of you are willing to give up police protection or have them do their job unarmed?
- C. In Jesus vision of the Realm of God, using violence to protect one's self, one's realm of God, destroys the very self one is trying to protect.
- D. In doing so, one loses their saltiness.
- E. Our humanity is destroyed because the image in which we were created, the image of a loving God, is smashed and shattered and it can no longer reflect the image of God.
- F. It is the last and greatest temptation, because defending who we are and what is valuable to us and protecting the world as we believe it should be is totally hardwired into our very being.
- G. But of course, you do realize that Jesus wasn't making a joke when he taught that in order to enter the Realm of God, one must be willing to lose everything.

- H. And it is so much to my ineptitude, our ineptitude, to do this, to overcome the last and greatest temptation, that in every moment of our waking day we need to be praying –
 - “lead us not into temptation.”
 - “lead us not into temptation.”
 - “lead us not into temptation.”
 - I. Because chances are that if we’re led there – we’re goin’ in.
- VI. The good news is that even when we go in, which God seems to know we have a tendency to do, the loving grace of God will ultimately “deliver us from evil.”
- A. But if we don’t at least try to overcome that temptation, then we cheapen that grace.
 - B. The term and most definitive analysis of “cheap grace” was provided by the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was imprisoned and executed for his role in the plot to assassinate Hitler.
 - C. Even he, in the end, couldn’t resist the temptation.

**D. You can't save the village by burning it.
You can't build the Realm by force;
it would be like salt that has lost its saltiness.**

AMEN.