

“What Would Jesus Say to...School Violence”

Scriptures in today's message: Luke 22:35-36; Matthew 26:52; Luke 8:26

Family Activity for the Week: Read Psalm 91:1-2. We can always trust God, even amid disappointment, fear, uncertainty as well as joy. Gather as a family in a favorite room in your home. Talk about why that room is a favorite. Is it extra comfortable? Does it have more lighting? Now, move together to the least favorite room in your home (maybe the garage or laundry room). Discuss why it is the least favorite. Is it the dirtiest or the darkest? Return to the comfortable room and talk about where each person experiences God's presence most deeply. Ask each person to choose one uncomfortable or unfamiliar place this week to spend a bit of time and to remember God is always present with everyone, everywhere and in every situation. Thank God in prayer for always being with you and your family.

Monday, May 20 – Read Luke 22:36-51, John 18:33-36. Sometimes people quote Luke 22:36 to try to prove that Jesus told his followers to buy arms. The broader context points the other way, especially when we recognize in this same chapter is where we find Judas, who was part of a violent sect, betraying Jesus. Jesus seems to exaggerate to stress how dangerous things will be for his followers. He doesn't literally intend for them to sell their clothes and go naked in order to buy a sword. The disciples take the verse literally and Jesus is deeply annoyed with them, finally saying, “Enough!” Peter tried to defend Jesus with a sword but was told to stop. In Matthew 26:52, Jesus added, “All who use the sword will die by the sword.” He told Pilate his Kingdom wasn't earthly, so his disciples weren't offering armed resistance.

- Scholar N. T. Wright wrote, “When Jesus says ‘That's enough!’ he isn't suggesting that two swords would be sufficient for the job in hand (what could that possibly mean?); he is wearily putting a stop to the entire conversation, in which at every point they seem determined to misunderstand him.” What are the spiritual hazards of being “determined to misunderstand” Jesus? How can we avoid doing that?
- British scholar William Barclay wrote of John 18, “[Jesus] makes it quite clear that he claims to be a king and equally clear that his kingdom is not based on force but is a kingdom in the hearts of men. He would never deny that he aimed at conquest, but it was the conquest of love.” To Pilate, the Jewish leaders (and at times even to his disciples), Jesus' idea looked naïve and unrealistic. Did Jesus accomplish “the conquest of love” in our world? In your heart?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, your Kingdom is not of this world—yet, for now, I live here. Guide me and give me wisdom to know how to live as one of your disciples in a world that too often rejects you. Amen.*

Tuesday, May 21 – Read Luke 6:27-36. Jesus taught his followers how to live with his peace and joy. He also realized that not all would be willing to accept what he taught when he said, “All who are willing to hear.” The types of behavior Jesus described are not natural to us. We only move toward Jesus' kind of open, fear-free life as we allow the Holy Spirit to reshape our natural impulses to grow the fruit of kindness in our lives.

- Jesus gave specific examples, not to set up new rules for us, but to show the spirit in which he called us to live. Luke 6:30 in *The Message* reads, “If someone takes unfair advantage of you, use the occasion to practice the servant life. No more tit-for-tat stuff. Live generously.” When has someone touched your life for the better by living generously? When have you found joy in living generously toward someone else?
- Luke linked the Golden Rule, “Treat people in the same way that you want them to treat you,” to Jesus' words about how to treat enemies. In what relationships do you find it hardest for you to treat others as you'd wish them to treat you? How can Jesus' teaching help you discern how to live out the Golden Rule in ways that bless others while you maintain healthy boundaries and self-care?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, pray for those who mistreat me? Love my enemies? You did it, but you were—well, you. I'm willing to listen to your teaching, and to learn your ways. Amen.*

Wednesday, May 22 – Read Luke 19:37-44. Jesus entered Jerusalem in a way that fulfilled God's promise to return to his people in peace (see Zechariah 9:9-16). His followers rejoiced, but verse 39 showed his enemies still insisting that he stop. Jesus knew forces of deep tragedy and disaster were at work. They would kill him, but in the longer view the city's people and religious leaders, fixated on violent ways to seek freedom, faced doom at Rome's hands. Jesus wept over heedless Jerusalem.

- Jesus wept because, he said, the people in Jerusalem did not know, “the things that lead to peace.” Martin Luther King preached that principled non-violence often outrages those who believe violence is a solution, not a problem. How good are you at listening to God's voice in your life? Are you resisting or denying anything that would bring you peace? If so, will you open yourself to Jesus' message?

- N. T. Wright wrote, “Jesus’ tears are at the core of the Christian gospel.... he had warned of God’s impending judgment on the city and Temple, because they...had resisted his call for peace, for the gospel of God’s grace which would reach out in love to the Gentile world.... remember, with awe, that if Luke 19:11–27 is indeed about Jesus embodying the long-awaited return of God to Zion, those tears are not just the human reaction to a sad and frustrating situation. They are the tears of the God of love.” Do you believe mass shootings today, like Jerusalem of old’s fate, bring the God of love to tears?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, you yearned for your people to accept the things that lead to peace. Make me a person who shares your yearning, who is a messenger of peace. Amen.*

Thursday, May 23 – Read Luke 8:26-39. The man who lived among the tombs was a danger to himself and others. The story suggests that the people of that region had responded to the man’s condition with fear, with attempts to isolate and restrain him. In contrast, Jesus set out to help and heal the man. It was an approach that must have initially looked hopeless but, in the end, had a beautiful, positive outcome.

- This man frightened and disturbed the people of his region. Both the actions of evil beings and conditions we call “mental illness” were all classified as “demon possession” in the first century. What resources exist today that did not exist in Jesus’ day that might bring healing to this man who lived among the tombs? How did Jesus’ focus on healing and helping set the stage for the man’s life to change?
- Change, even positive change, can make us uncomfortable. It seems strange that the townspeople reacted with fear when they saw the man dressed and acting normal. It may be that they weren’t sure they could trust the change to last. What directions does Jesus’ example suggest for our society in dealing with people whose mental ills may incline them to violent actions?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, just as you calmed the storms on the sea of Galilee, you calmed the inner storms that had torn the poor man’s life apart. Give me the wisdom to take in, and to share, your calming, healing presence. Amen.*

Friday, May 24 – Read Luke 18:15-16; Matthew 2:16-18. Pastor John Ortberg wrote, “In the ancient, status-ordered world, children were at the bottom of the ladder.... Jesus said the kind of thing that would literally never enter the mind of another human being to say: ‘And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.’” When children were brought to Jesus, “the disciples rebuked the parents. Jesus rebuked the disciples.” Our world and culture tend to value children highly (thanks in large part to Jesus and his followers), so it is hard for us to realize how little regard most people in Jesus’ day had for children. Herod’s brutal action showed much of that day’s thinking.

- We value children and young people, so we try to teach parents how to love their children well. Despite differences about funding levels, most of us agree that we owe children a good education. We grieve over school shootings. Yet we’ve also seen young people rebuked and ridiculed for actively asking for changes to lessen the danger of school shootings. No matter what you believe about specific solutions, what does Jesus’ attitude tell you about how seriously Jesus would want us to act to protect and nurture children?
- Plutarch, a Greek writer who lived shortly after Jesus’ life, wrote that infants were, “more like a plant than a human being.” By contrast, the early Christian book The Shepherd of Hermas said, “All babies are glorious before God.” How crucial was Jesus’ regard for children in showing how highly God values children? How do our FUMC Kids and JOLT ministries seek to live out that value? What qualities of children do you believe make them a picture of the spirit God seeks in all of us?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, you took the children to your arms and your heart. Even if we differ about the best ways to protect our young people, help me never to degrade the young ones you loved and welcomed. Amen.*

Saturday, May 25 – Read Luke 12:1-12. N. T. Wright clarified the spiritual nature of what Jesus identified as the greatest danger for his followers: “They mustn’t be afraid of mere mortal enemies. The real enemy is the one who longs to cast people into Gehenna. Gehenna was the name of Jerusalem’s smoldering rubbish-heap, and the word was already in use as an image of hellfire. This cannot mean that one should fear God, though in some senses that is a good and right thing to do. It means that one should recognize who the ultimate enemy is. In this picture, God is not the enemy to be feared; he is one to trust, the one who values his children more highly than a whole flock of sparrows, who has the very hairs of our head all numbered.” It is important not to choose means of seeking earthly safety that imperil our loyalty to Jesus’ ways.

- Christians have always wrestled with how to apply Jesus’ teaching most ethically—and have not reached anonymity. From all-out pacifism to those who apply “just war” ethics, not only to national actions but to personal or neighborhood safety, the range of ideas can create tension and conflict. But at a minimum, Jesus said he didn’t want his followers to live in fear or make their choices by trusting in human strength rather than God’s eternal faithfulness. Think prayerfully about where you put your greatest trust for “security.” If you find any disconnect from Jesus’ teaching and model, ask the Holy Spirit to guide you into a deeper connection to the Savior’s principles.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, when I feel afraid, turn my thoughts to the truth that, as your child, I am always, at all times, held safely in your mighty eternal arms. Amen.*