

Loving God, Loving Neighbor

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

Luke 10: 25-28 NRSV

Anabaptists Exiled

In early April 1693 in the Emmenthal Valley of Switzerland, a group of Christians gathered in the home of Michel Burkhalter to sing and pray. The government had issued a new mandate requiring every citizen age fourteen or older to appear before the magistrates by April 17 to swear an oath of allegiance. Anyone refusing to swear the oath was declared an Anabaptist, and banished from the country.

The group sang softly. *"Dear Jesus Christ, our Lord, help us in our distress...The last hour has come upon us...We are hated, persecuted, and exiled...There is no place for us on earth."* (Loewen, 41)

On April 17, having refused to take the oath of allegiance, this small group moved slowly northward, leaving their homes and community behind for an unknown future. As they walked, they sang: *"I will build upon your Word, Lord, for it is my staff and shield...With all my heart I plead with you, forgive all my sins, and also, dearest Lord, forgive the sins of all our enemies."* (Loewen, 43)

This is a calling that takes me beyond national allegiances...I have to live with the meaning of my commitment to the ministry of Jesus Christ. To me the relationship of this ministry to the making of peace is so obvious that I sometimes marvel at those who ask me why I am speaking against the war. Could it be that they do not know that the good news was meant for all men--for communist and capitalist, for their children and ours, for black and for white, for revolutionary and conservative? Have they forgotten that my ministry is in obedience to the one who loved his enemies so fully that he died for them? What then can I say to the Vietcong or to Castro or to Mao as a faithful minister of this one? Can I threaten them with death or must I not share with them my life?

*Martin Luther King, Jr.
April 4, 1967*

Unlikely Heroes and Victims

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Luke 10:29-37 NRSV

Dirk Willems, Asperen, 1569

Dirk Willems figures prominently in one of the most popular Anabaptist stories. Tried and convicted as an Anabaptist, Willems managed to escape from prison by making a rope from knotted rags. He safely crossed the frozen castle moat. As he escaped, a guard saw him and pursued Willems. When the guard tried to cross the frozen moat, the ice broke. Willems heard the guard's cries, showed compassion and returned to help the guard. Unfortunately, the guard did not return Willems' deed by allowing him to go free. Rather, he recaptured Dirk and took him to a more secure prison.

His captors eventually took Dirk Willems to be burned at the stake. Although a high wind delayed the execution, Dirk Willems died amidst the flames (Mirror of the Martyrs).

Letter to President Bush from Phyllis and Orlando Rodriguez

Dear President Bush:

Our son is one of the victims of Tuesday's attack of the World Trade Center. We read about your response in the last few days and about the resolutions from both Houses, giving you undefined power to respond to the terror attacks.

Your response to this attack does not make us feel better about our son's death. It makes us feel worse. It makes us feel our government is using our son's memory as a justification to cause suffering for other sons and parents in other lands.

It is not the first time that a person in your position has been given unlimited power and came to regret it. This is not the time for empty gestures to make us feel better. It is not the time to act like bullies. We urge you to think about how our government can develop peaceful, rational solutions to terrorism, solutions that do not sink us to the inhuman levels of terrorists.

The One Who Showed Mercy

“Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

Luke 10:36,37 NRSV

A Global Community

Excerpted from An Open Letter to Americans, by Vinoth Ramachandra, Sri Lanka

As a non-American, what disturbs me most about the aftermath to the tragedy (September 11) is the self-righteous hypocrisy...from most sections of the American media...What do Pol Pot, Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden have in common, apart from being mass murderers?.. they were all equipped and supported by the CIA until American interests changed...

Remember that the majority of Christians in the world live outside the Western nations. Even as I write, Christians in Pakistan, Indonesia and other majority-Muslim countries are fearful of the backlash in the event of an indiscriminate airstrike by the United States against Afghanistan. These are your brothers and sisters in Christ. We need to learn to think and respond not primarily as Americans, but as Christians who belong to a global community, the Body of Christ, which claims our final allegiance.

Grace in Belgrade

One evening in December 1999, Dan and Evanna Hess, MCC workers from Lancaster, Pennsylvania, attended a small Christian fellowship in Belgrade, Yugoslavia. Dan and Evanna weren't sure what kind of reception they would receive among these Serbian Christians, just six months after U.S. bombing had ended. They were astounded to find a group of Christians who had prayed throughout the bombing of their country that God would protect them against bitterness and thoughts of revenge. During the service, these Christians gathered around Dan and Evanna, praying God's blessing on them and on the U.S. as a nation.

Response Form

1. As a congregation or small group, list some possible Anabaptist responses to the negative acts in your community. What could your congregation do to build upon some of the positive responses?

2. As a congregation or small group, what form could Anabaptist responses take on a global level?

3. Which of these responses would you, as a congregation or small group, be ready to commit to on both a community and global level?

Congregation _____

City _____ State _____

Name of Facilitator _____

Contact number or email address: _____

**Mail this form to:
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P.O. Box 500
Akron, PA 17501-0500**