

# SUNDAY

by SUNDAY

by Joan Mitchell, CSJ

Place a newspaper or globe at the center of your group, and light a candle beside it. Pray together.

**LEADER:** Let us remember people on our globe in the midst of war and conflict. *Recall events in the news.*

**LEADER:** Jesus, we recognize we often have trouble loving our friends, much less our enemies.

**ALL:** Yet we trust that you do not ask something of us unless you also give us the grace to do it.

**LEADER:** Be with us as we ponder your words together.

**ALL:** Lead us on the way of peace and nonviolence.

“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who insult you.” Jesus’ teaching doesn’t get harder than this. It challenges us to hold conflicts in tension, stretch beyond our egos, and hear into speech people long silenced or different from ourselves.

Much in our culture reinforces a win/lose, destroy-your-enemies point of view. We mark our history by its wars. Video games develop skill to blast, bomb, shoot, shatter, and kill rather than negotiate conflicts.

What if we practiced making friends of enemies? What

if games challenged players to find the mutual interest opponents did not recognize they had or get out all the facts so the game could move to the negotiation level? What if players scored points for creative and cooperative solutions to problems?

Currently one of my nieces is studying negotiation at a law school. To her this seems a skill for helping mend the world. “What do the parties in a conflict really want?” This is a key question, she says. “What

if two parties fighting over an orange decide to cut it in half and never learn that one wants the rind and the other the juice?”

To love our enemies is the heart of Jesus’ teaching. It is the challenge to which Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. also gave their lives in our times.

“Gandhi was inevitable,” Dr. King writes. “If humanity is to progress, Gandhi is inescapable. He lived, thought and acted, inspired by the vision of humanity evolving toward a world of peace and harmony.

We may ignore him at our own risk.”

Ultimately our identity and self-worth are at stake in our conflicts. Who will we be if we negotiate and compromise rather than win? How can we transform *either/or* into *both/and* in our personal, public, national, and global lives?

● When and how have you successfully negotiated a conflict or difference or made a friend of a seeming enemy?



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# GOSPEL

## Love your enemies.

**NARRATOR:** Jesus spoke to his disciples.

**JESUS 1:** To you who hear me, I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you and pray for those who insult you.

**JESUS 2:** When people slap you on one cheek, turn and give them your other cheek. When people want your coat, give them your shirt, too. When someone takes what is yours, do not ask for it back.

**JESUS 3:** Do to others what you would have them do to you. If you love those who love you, what thanks should you get? Even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what thanks should you get? Sinners do the same.

**JESUS 4:** If you lend to those whom you expect to repay you,

what thanks is there to you? Sinners lend to sinners, because they will be repaid.

**JESUS 1:** Love your enemy and do good; lend without expecting anything in return. Then will your reward be great. You will be children of the Most High because God is kind to the ungrateful and evil.

**JESUS 2:** Be compassionate, as God is compassionate. Do not judge, and you will not be judged.

**JESUS 3:** Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Pardon, and you shall be pardoned. Give, and it shall be given to you.

**JESUS 4:** Good measure pressed down, shaken together, running over will they give to you. For the measure you measure with will be measured back to you.

Luke 6.27-38



## Jesus calls us to let diversity flourish.

To counteract how habitually and easily we human beings create enemies, Jesus has a remedy. He throws us a radical challenge—to respond to our enemies (real or perceived) with love rather than hate, with nonviolence rather than retribution.

Jesus' teaching differs from the principle of talion—an eye-for-an-eye and a tooth-

for-a-tooth (Exodus 21.23-24; Leviticus 24.19-20). Talion sets limits on retribution by establishing the right to seek vengeance only in proportion to the offense. A person could seek to put out one eye to avenge an injury to one eye but could not harm both eyes of an enemy. This morality accepts a violent community.

The biblical narratives of Genesis 1-11 use the same binary

logic as modern computers that build a system on the differences between two things.

Cain and Abel, Sarah and Hagar, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, Leah and Rachel. The stories about each of these pairs contrast the opposition: farmer vs. shepherd, barren free woman vs. fruitful slave woman, legitimate heir vs. illegitimate child, shrewd vs. dumb, older vs. younger.

Jesus' teaching differs from the familiar logic that sees good and evil as either/or opposites. Isn't Christianity all about saying yes to good and no to evil? No, not really.

Loving one's enemies asks us to say yes to loving both good people and those who wrong us, who injure us, who act with malice toward us, or whom we perceive as evil. Jesus teaches a win-win ethic rather than a win-lose.

In urging us to nonviolence Jesus also goes beyond the more enlightened morality of the Old Testament that commands, "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19.18). This morality sets one's self as the measure of how to treat others. Jesus challenges us to take God as our compassionate standard.

● **What oppositions seem important to you in our culture? Male/female, black/white, white collar/blue collar, rich/poor?**

● **What differences alienate you? What differences interest and intrigue you?**

● **How can we respect and cherish differences in people rather than reject them?**

Jesus pushes us to a logic of the heart that goes far beyond doing to others as they do to us (vengeance). He urges us to empathy—putting ourselves in others’ shoes and treating them as we would want to be treated ourselves (the golden rule). He envisions for us a community in which God’s compassion sets the standard and we treat even those who hurt us as friends.

Colgate University religion professor Kenneth Morgan described in the *New York Times* a scene he witnessed in Damascus. A porter bent under a heavy load bumped a man riding a bike with a basket of oranges balanced on the handlebars. The porter dropped the load; the oranges went helter-skelter. The two men exchanged insults. The bicyclist moved toward the porter, clenched fist raised.

A tattered little man, the writer remembers, slipped out of the crowd of onlookers, took the raised fist in his hands, and kissed it. The crowd murmured approval. The two men relaxed.

Onlookers began to help pick up the oranges. The tattered man’s kiss eased hostility and encircled the injured man with a helping community.

● **What experience do you have of someone negotiating a conflict or someone easing hostilities?**

● **When have you played the role of the tattered man, or witnessed someone living Jesus’ teaching?**

Some people who love their enemies up the odds of winding up dead as Jesus did. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., led a nonviolent struggle for civil rights for African Americans until an assassin shot him. His mentor Mahatma Gandhi led a successful nonviolent struggle for Indian self-determination but was shot shortly after independence from Great Britain.

Both of these leaders could see the ancient truth that blood begets blood. Dr. King, Gandhi, and Jesus all worked to build a new inclusive community, not simply to prevail over their opponents.



“We will match your capacity to inflict suffering with our capacity to endure suffering,” writes Dr. King. “We will meet your physical force with soul force. In winning victory, we will not only win our freedom. We will so appeal to your heart and your conscience that we will win you in the process.”

● **Have you acted nonviolently? Where did it get you?**

● **How does acting nonviolently differ from accepting the victim role in cases of family violence?**

Sunday’s gospel concludes with five parallel sayings. The first saying establishes God as the model for Jesus’ followers. “Be compassionate as God is compassionate.” In her book *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, Old Testament scholar Phyllis Trible explores the Hebrew word *rhm*, which we translate *compassion* or *mercy*. *Rhm* has its roots in the Hebrew word for *womb*, formed with the same three consonants.

This root meaning connects compassion with the feeling that a mother has for a child she has carried in her womb. To say God is merciful is to say God is

## DO SOMETHING

CHARITY

JUSTICE

● **Visit the bi-national Kino Border Initiative to learn what staff and volunteers see on both sides of the Nogales, Arizona, border. Named for the first Jesuit missionary in the Sonoma, Mexico area, KBI served more than 40,000 meals last year at its Comedor. It offers educational immersions and advocacy. [Kinoborderinitiative.org](http://Kinoborderinitiative.org).**

full of a mother's unconditional love for the child of her own body. For example, in Isaiah 49.15, the *New American Bible* translation, God asks through the prophet, "Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness (*rhm*) for the child of her womb? Even should she forget, I will never forget you." To imitate God's compassion, mercy, and tenderness is to love others as if they were of one's own body, seed, blood.

● How do Jesus' teachings—do not judge or condemn, instead pardon, give generously—work for you?

## FIRST READING

### David acts violently.

David in Sunday's first reading provides an example of nonviolence. This story happens while Saul is hunting down David, whose popularity has made Saul very jealous. In this passage David has a chance to kill Saul but will not kill Yahweh's anointed king.

Interestingly, in the ancient southern kingdom of Judah, where God established David's family as the royal house, kings became kings peacefully by right of family succession. In the ancient northern kingdom called Israel, new kings seized the throne by assassinating the former king.

### David spares Saul.

Saul went off to the desert of Ziph with three thousand picked men of Israel to search for David. So David and Abishai went among Saul's soldiers by night and found Saul lying asleep within the barricade, with his spear thrust into the ground at his head and Abner and his men sleeping around him.

Abishai whispered to David, "God has delivered your enemy into your grasp this day. Let me nail him to the ground with one thrust of the spear; I will not need a second thrust!" But David said to Abishai, "Do not harm him, for who can lay hands on God's anointed and remain unpunished?" So David took the spear and the water jug from their place at Saul's head, and they got away without anyone seeing or knowing or awakening. All remained asleep, because the Holy One had put them into a deep slumber.

Going across to an opposite slope, David stood on a remote hilltop at a great distance from Abner, son of Ner, and the troops. He called out, "Here is the king's spear. Let an attendant come over to get it. God will reward each man for his justice and faithfulness. Today, though the Holy One delivered you into my grasp, I would not harm God's anointed."

1 Samuel 26.2,7-9,12-13,22-23

- What experience have you had of nonviolent acts like David's leading to new stability?
- What experience of violence escalating violence have you had?

## PRAY

To conclude your scripture reflection, read together the following resolutions adapted from the Pax Christi Vow of Nonviolence. If you can, commit to one resolution for this week.

I will strive for peace within myself.

I will seek to be a peacemaker in my daily life.

I will accept suffering rather than afflict it.

I will refuse to retaliate in the face of provocation and violence.

I will persevere in nonviolence of tongue and heart.

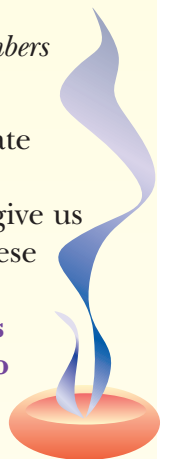
I will live simply, so I do not deprive others of the means to live.

I will actively work to abolish war and the causes of war from my own heart and from the face of the earth.

*Turn turns sharing any commitments group members wish to make.*

**LEADER:** Compassionate God, we trust your sustaining love. You give us the desire to make these promises.

**ALL:** In your goodness and mercy give us also the grace to act on them. Amen.



*Joan Mitchell, CSJ, editor of Sunday by Sunday, holds a Masters in Theological Studies from Harvard Divinity School and a Ph.D. in New Testament from Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN.*

Be ready for Ash Wednesday, March 5, with the prayer service at [goodgroundpress.com](http://goodgroundpress.com).