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Hey, everybody. So they say a picture is worth a thousand words. So I'd like to begin with an image, if we could. What is the meaning of the cross? What do you see there? Jesus said that greater love has no man than when one lays down his life for his friends. So what Jesus saw when you look to his cross was a demonstration of love, but what kind of love? The Apostle Paul says "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. While we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his son." So what kind of love? Enemy love. While we were God's enemies.

The New Testament picture is God's enemy love in action. God incarnate. And there's a contrast between what Rome was doing on their cross and what God was doing in Christ on the cross. What Rome was doing was about torture, hurt, and justice that comes down like a hammer. What God was doing was love in the middle of injustice, in spite of injustice, God with the victims. And this is something that's profoundly political, because what it means is that God is overturning, and rejecting, and undoing that justice that comes down like a hammer, because of that identification with the victim.

However, Christian theology has traditionally framed the cross as the polar opposite of that, instead actually siding with the justice of Rome, as if Rome was right with their justice that comes down like a hammer. It's about fulfillment of the wrath of God, about satisfaction of that wrath, and in doing that, they completely miss the point of the New Testament, where the crucifixion is framed in the context of grave injustice, not as a justice, as a tragedy, as a miscarriage of justice.

So why is it that this view of the cross has become the most common understanding of the cross in Christian theology. Why? I think the problem is that we don't believe in enemy love, and, therefore, we don't get it. At best, we think that it's about foregoing justice, rather than a way to bring about justice. I'd like to address that problem that I think that we have in our culture and in the church as well, that we don't really believe in enemy love.

I'd like to share a quote from H.R. Mackintosh, writing in 1927. He writes, "We have never forgiven the deadly injury at a price like this, at such a cost to ourselves, as came upon God at Jesus' death. We fail to comprehend such sacrificial love, because it far outstrips our shrunken conceptions of what love can endure. Let the man be found who has undergone the shattering experience of pardoning nobly and tenderly some awful wrong done to himself, still more to one beloved by him, and he will understand the meaning of Calvary better than all the theologians in the world. Only when we can learn to walk in the way of enemy love will we understand Christ's cross. Only then."

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And as Mackintosh says, the problem is that we can't comprehend the way of the cross, and we don't see it as an answer to our real conflicts, our real injury, our real hurts, our real needs. We think that it's about not protecting our loved ones to act in enemy love, rather than a way to care for and to end suffering.

The classic argument goes like this. Hitler has broken into your house, and now has your wife at gunpoint. You have a gun in your hand, coincidentally, and you are just good enough of a shot that you could shoot him in the head, but not good enough of a shot that you could shoot the gun out of his hand, or something. So you have only two choices. Do you shoot him in the face or do you do nothing? And this is a rather extreme example of the classic "what if" question. What would you do if in the situation of nonviolence? And it puts us into a sort of Sophie's Choice dilemma. Do we deny our loved one, or do we deny Christ?

However, for those who are asking the question, it's not really question. It's more of an accusation. It's basically saying it's friggin' Hitler. I mean I get that you wouldn't want to use violence in most cases, but it's Hitler. At least you'd shoot Hitler, right? At least you'd then do something, and not be passive. And so we're caught in a classic us/them dilemma, where both sides see the other side as wrong, and immoral, and evil, where from the perspective of nonviolence, those of us who are on that side see ourselves backed into a corner, and made to do something that we feel is wrong, but from the other side, they see us as neglecting to care, neglecting to protect. So the question is: How do we break out of that?

I think that a start is to recognize the legitimate desire to care for and protect, that that is important and good. And unfortunately, some of my fellow pacifists often frame nonviolence in the sense of simply looking at the Biblical mandate for it, and not expressing how this is not in contradiction. In fact, they stress the opposite. They say things like, "Well, isn't the way of the cross foolishness? So it doesn't need to make sense to you. And doesn't Jesus tell us to die to ourselves? So there you go. Don't we need to follow Jesus regardless of the cross?" they argue.

The problem here, however, is that unquestioning obedience inevitably leads to a hurtful interpretation and often to abuse, and that's really critical. We need to evaluate, because we cannot be faithful and follow if we don't understand how. For example, if I gave a scenario and asked should a woman return to a situation of domestic abuse and violence for Jesus, I would hope that most of us here would say heavens no, that is not what Jesus intended, that is not what this is about. And exactly right there, where we say that, that's what I'm talking about. That's what we need to be doing. We need to be evaluating, we need to be thinking about how to correctly follow, what it means to follow, so that we don't just blindly follow, and then do it in a hurtful way. And that's hard work, but we must find a way to articulate this. We must find a way to articulate what it means to walk in enemy love as a viable solution to our problems and the world's problems.

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So I'd like to propose some criteria for thinking about enemy love. Love of enemies is not simply refusal to engage in violence. Rather, it is a better and more effective way of resolving conflict and ending hurt. It's, indeed, countercultural, but it is not illogical, nor is it unrealistic. It is not opposed to a healthy desire to care for and protect ourselves and those we love.

So this brings us to the question of what is justice? Now when politicians speak of bringing about justice what they mean is dropping bombs, sending drones. And when those same politicians also speak of being soft on crime that the fear is ... the fear in both cases is that if we don't react in violence then it would be seen as weakness, if our nation did that, or if we don't respond to crime ... if we're not tough on crime, if we're soft on crime, then it will just run rampant. But that's retributive justice. That's the definition of retributive justice: justice that is understood in terms of violent payback for enemies and offenders. A love of enemies challenges this and asks what if justice was not about punishing and hurting, but about mending and making things right? What if justice was not about deterring through negative consequences, but about doing something good to reverse the hurtful dynamics? What if real justice was about repairing broken lives? That, in contrast to retributive justice, is restorative justice, a justice that works to repair.

Consider the example of crime. In our current criminal justice system the focus on retributive justice becomes a factory for hardening criminals rather than healing them. Instead of learning empathy and how to manage their impulses and emotions, the brutal culture of prison life teaches them that they must be violent in order to survive. And because of these patterns learned in prison, the alarming repeat offense rate is not at all surprising. Locking someone up in the hell of prison naturally breeds violence, not reform. You do not learn empathy by being shamed and dehumanized. And retribution gains popular support in our culture by appealing to our most primitive impulses, but in the end it results in a broken system that perpetuates hurt and cycles of violence, and it makes us all less safe. So what is the alternative? I'd like to share an example from my hometown in San Francisco. The San Francisco Sheriff's Department RSVP program, where they work with society's most violent men, wife beaters, murderers, gangbangers. Rather than simply doing their time stewing in resentment in their cell, or being in the middle of the violent culture in the prison yard, they learn in the community to become self-reflective, developing empathy, and finding healthy ways of managing their emotions, and the results are striking. A staggering 80 percent reduction in violent repeat offenses, plus a dramatic reduction in inmate violence as well.

Before, on average, per year, they would have around 60 assaults on officers. After this, this was completely eliminated. So the take home here is that this not only makes a world that is safer for us, but safer for the guards. It's not about neglecting justice, but on the contrary it's about an understanding of justice, based on

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restorative justice, that fulfills justice, that brings it about. This is restorative justice, and that is the framework for enemy love.

And what the RSVP program does is it debunks the popular myth that love of enemies works for individuals, but can't be applied on an institutional or governmental level. The common argument is that individuals can turn the other cheek, but a government can't do that, because they have an obligation to protect their citizens, but that doesn't really make any sense because it's no more right for an individual to endure harm, to endure abuse. It's not about individuals versus institutions. I propose, actually, the problem is that we're mixing up love of enemies with turning the other cheek. The two are not synonymous. Love of enemies is a general principle, applicable to both individuals in society, which has many different context-specific applications, and turning the other cheek is one particular application of the larger principle of enemy love.

In the proper context, turning the other cheek can be profoundly effective as a way to fight oppression. For example, names like Gandhi and Martin Luther King will immediately come to mind. But what is less well known is that beginning in the 1980s, for the first time in human history, often in the face of overwhelming military power and brutality, nonviolent campaigns toppled multiple oppressive regimes. A recent study compared 320 nonviolent versus violent resistance campaigns from 1900 to 2006, and what they found was that nonviolence was effective 53 percent of the time, whereas violence was only effective 26 percent of the time.

Now the assumption we have is that violence is always effective, that if we don't want violence, but if you want to get it done, well then I guess you'll have to resort to violence. But what the study shows is that violence is actually less effective, not more. I wish I could say that nonviolence was 100 percent effective, but the reality is that nothing works all of the time. But nonviolence in these examples is not only effective, but more effective, twice as effective, in fact. However, imagine asking a prison guard to apply that same principle, placing themselves in between two fighting inmates. This would not only be unreasonable to ask of a government employee, but it would be irresponsible to ask this. And why is that? Because the dynamics are completely reversed.

In the case of nonviolent revolution, it's those who are not in power acting in a way to expose the injustice of those who are in power. In the case of the prison guard, the guard is the one who's in power, and so the specific example of turning the other cheek doesn't work. That doesn't mean that love of enemies doesn't work, as the RSVP program demonstrates. Turning the other cheek, again, is a context-specific application of love of enemies, that in the appropriate context can be deeply effective, but in another context is ineffective, and, frankly, wrong.

So what we need to do is we need to look at the dynamics, the particular dynamics and ask what can we do to reverse those dynamics? What can we do to bring about

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healing? What can we do to bring about justice? What can we do to make things right?

This is a huge topic, and it's not something that can be covered in 20 minutes. I mean I've talked about the idea of restorative justice, of our criminal system, mentioned things like international conflict, but not in the sense of nonviolent revolution, but we haven't even touched on terrorism or home invasion. There's so many things that we could talk about, and that deserve 20 minutes of their own.

So I want to leave you with two things. First, that the Gospel, the message of the cross, the message of enemy love is profoundly relevant. It is not a religious topic on the side. It's a profoundly relevant thing that our world desperately needs to hear, and does not know how to implement and how to act on. And secondly, that if we want to communicate this intelligently as a viable way that works, then we have a lot to think about, a lot to discuss. So I hope that you can take this as a springboard in your discussions for productive conversation of how we can better live out Christ's way of enemy love. Thank you.

(Applause)