

Augustana College
Chapel of Reconciliation

Love your Enemies

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In considering what I might reflect upon this morning and in choosing the day's reading, I couldn't but help think about my own feelings of sadness and frustration at what I perceive to be ever the widening political, sectarian and cultural divide that has evolved over the last 5 years both in the United States and beyond. As such, I decided that here at the end of the semester, as we leave for the summer, we might seek to reflect upon the Gospel of Luke and God's challenge to love those who might wrong us.

This semester, Geoff Dipple invited some of us to read Jim Wallace's *God's Politics* and some of us have done better at it than others. In it Wallace mentions that of the many things Christ said, "Be Not Afraid" may have been his most often repeated statement. Wallace goes on to write of trappist monk Thomas Merton's well known argument that "the root of all war is fear." But, of course, fear is the root of many of our problems, is it not? The root of prejudice and discrimination is fear...fear of difference, fear of change, fear of losing one's job or good health. We often fear the unknown and fear the future...what will I do when I graduate. Fear can paralyze us or, maybe, it can make us take action. It is in how we handle our fear that we may find our greatest strength. Or, in truth, In following the advice of the Gospel, "to be merciful, just as your Father is merciful," we may conquer our fears.

This past Friday, in a fine reflection, senior Angie Hummel spoke of her time here at Augustana and she included her trip to India and discussed how she wrestled with confronting the endemic poverty contrasted by the stunning beauty of that country and how her experiences there challenged her understanding of self. Though I had already begun to write this piece, it seems to offer some measure of continuity that I too choose to reflect upon a figure that Angie mentioned; a person who stood up against prejudice and fear and faced it down. I speak of course of Mohandas K. Gandhi. I am sure the Mahatma is someone who is familiar to us all, but

sometimes we need to be reminded of the life, actions and writings of such figures in order to, as Christians, stay upon the path which God calls us to walk.

Born in 1869, to a relatively wealthy, Hindu family, Gandhi's parents, but particularly his mother, sought to instill in him fairly orthodox, Hindu upbringing. Gandhi nevertheless admitted that as a young man he was more an agnostic than ever a devout Hindu. At 18, Gandhi went to London to study law and after completing school and spending a brief time back in India, in 1893 he traveled to South Africa, at that time under British control, to work for the Indian community there.

For 21 years, while in South Africa, Gandhi fought the white minority's discrimination against the non-white majority. It is at this stage, that Gandhi developed his personal philosophy regarding how to fight against injustice and for political freedom. Gandhi, called his plan Satyagraha, meaning "soul force" and argued that the oppressed should seek to convert their oppressor through truth, social justice, love and suffering.

As preparation for his evolving philosophy Gandhi read extensively, including the Bible, Koran and the Bhagavad-Gita to help him come to the conclusion that humans all believe in the same, God but choose different paths on their search to find Him. When asked about his personal religion he was known to answer "I am a Christian, a Hindu, a Muslim and a Jew."

In forming his personal philosophy, Gandhi believed that compassion for the suffering of others and constructive work, were necessary ingredients of satyagraha. The success of Satyagraha can be explained by the fact that anyone, truly wishing to perform it, needed no leader. Thus, while often the authorities placed Gandhi in jail, his movement continued on without his presence.

Methods of Satyagraha included prayers, fasts, penance, strikes, defying certain civil laws, spreading literacy and removal of social inequalities. In particular, all Gandhi's Satyagrahas were open to everyone, irrespective of caste, creed, sex or age. One important key to Gandhi's work was that he brought the masses into his movement and he made all feel part of his effort to fight for India's independence and against social injustice.

Gandhi returned to India in 1917 and within two years his public political work began as in 1919, there at an organized peaceful demonstration, the British fired on an unarmed crowd in an enclosed courtyard killing over 300 and wounding some 1200. Known as the Amritsar Massacre, it was a galvanizing moment for the Indian Independence movement, Gandhi called for civil disobedience against the British which was a combination of fasting and prayer meetings and breaking of some civil laws. He called for Indians to boycott British goods, honors and jobs.

While the protest movement had early success, unfortunately, the civil disobedience gatherings increasing became violent and Gandhi, who the British jailed in 1922, called for their end. In order to stop the violence, Gandhi went on a hunger strike; one of his many, that often brought him to the brink of death.

It is at these darkest of moments that Gandhi wrote that he found that God never let him down. “God is the hardest task-master I have known on this earth, and He tries you through and through. And when you find that your faith is failing or your body is failing you and you are sinking, He comes to your assistance somehow or other....He is always at your beck and call but on His terms, not on your terms. So I have found. I cannot recall a single instance when, at the eleventh hour, he has forsaken me.”

Ever the master of symbolism, at the age of 61, in 1930, Gandhi marched 50,000 people, 200 miles to the sea in order to make salt without paying the tax that Britain imposed upon this staple. The police attacked the marchers and injured thousands, but Gandhi’s supporters did not retaliate. Over the next few months, the British would imprison 60,000 people including much of the Independence movement’s leadership, future prime minister’s Nehru’s own mother and Gandhi; no rioting occurred in response.

Maybe it is at this moment that his followers understood his message of nonviolence; that standing up to brutality without resorting to violence demanded exceptional self-control and courage. But Gandhi insisted that a Satyagrahi could only oppose an unfair act, never an unfair

person. As he stated “He who has a living faith in God will not do evil deeds with the name of God on his lips. He will not rely on the sword but will rely solely on God....He alone is a man of God who sees...God in every soul.”

For Gandhi, passive resistance was the harder choice as he asked “Wherein is courage required in blowing others to pieces from behind a cannon, or with a smiling face to approach a cannon and be blown to pieces? Who is the true warrior—he who keeps death always as a bosom friend, or he who controls the death of others? Believe me that a man devoid of courage and manhood can never be a passive resister. Passive resistance is an all-sided sword, it can be used anyhow; it blesses him who uses it and him against whom it is used.”

Yet, for the Mahatma (great soul), passive resistance was active political action and he argued that the true measure of their worth was in how a person lived, not in what that person believed. In truth Gandhi was very much a man of action and he believed his followers should, in service to the deity, join him in action. Particularly Gandhi sought to aid the poor for as he stated, “To a people famishing and idle, the only acceptable form in which God can dare appear is work and promise of food and wages.” Here Gandhi was referring to the untouchables, the lowest of the low in India’s caste system, as Gandhi called them, the harijans, or children of God. These persons were, in effect, untouchable. As he wrote of his harijans: “I know I cannot find Him apart from humanity...I claim I know my millions. All the hours of the day I am with them. They are my first care and last because I recognize no God except the God that is found in the hearts of the [dumb] millions.

Though the British authorities had brought Gandhi to London after the success of the salt campaign in 1930, it was not until after the end of WWII in 1947, that India would gain its Independence.

Shockingly, within months of independence Gandhi was dead; a radical Hindu angered at Gandhi’s call for tolerance to Muslims shot the Mahatma on his way to prayer. Yet, Gandhi may have already seen his fate; as if one so close to God already knows when his time on earth is complete. Not long before the 78 year old was assassinated, he wrote “Have I the nonviolence of

the brave in me? My death alone will show that. If someone killed me and I died with prayer for the assassin on my lips, and God's remembrance and consciousness of His living presence in the sanctity of my heart, then alone would I be said to have the nonviolence of the brave." It is said that as he lay dying Gandhi whispered rama, rama, rama. I forgive you. I love you, I bless you.

Ultimately, to be a follower of Gandhi is no easy task. The Mahatma spent the equivalent of seven years in jail and experienced many beatings and abuse as well as near starvation. He had high expectations for his followers and made great demands upon them. Nevertheless, he was well aware of human limitations and noted that "If we could solve all the mysteries of the Universe we would then be equal with God. Every drop of ocean shares its glory but is not the ocean." He knew well of human frailty.

I am not here to suggest that any of us can or should be a Mohandas K. Gandhi, a Martin Luther King or a Mother Theresa, but if, as today's gospel suggests, we at least try to: love our enemies, do good to them and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then maybe our reward will be great, and we will be children of the Most High, because He is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.

Quotes from Hill, Brennan R, *8 Spiritual Heroes: their Search for God*

And

Gandhi, M.K. *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule*

CAMPUS MINISTRY ANNOUNCEMENTS

KOINONIA - Tomorrow., May 9th, 10 am, will be our final meeting for the year. Seniors who are considering or entering seminary will be relating helpful moments in their discernment process.

SENIOR SPEAKERS - Sign-up for senior speakers for 2006-07 school term has begun. The sign-up sheet is on the Narthex table. Senior who are going to be off-campus during either semester are encouraged to select a Friday when they are on campus.

MIDNIGHT MADNESS - Our Savior's Lutheran Church is again opening it's doors to Augie students on **Sunday, May 14th and Monday, May 15th**, for study areas during finals. Study space will be available from 6 pm to 2 am each night. Snack and beverages are provided as well as well as a late night meal of 'comfort food' from 11 - 12 pm.

FR. MIKE'S 2ND ANNUAL 1K "RUN" - The Vikings and the Cougars are teaming up for this 'challenging event'. Come on over to Christ the King parish (26th and Lake Ave.) **at 4 pm on Wed., May 17th**. Sign up on the Chapel Narthex table.

CHAPEL SCHEDULE

Tuesday (9)	Koinonia, 10 am
Wednesday (10)	Holy Communion, 10 am - Jim Bies; ASA Inauguration; Women's Choir
Friday (12)	Worship, 10 am - Celebration of Intern Sarah!!; Clarinet Duet; "Expanded Treats-on-Friday!!"
Sunday (14)	Worship, 11 am - Sarah Sumner-Eisenbraun
Sunday (21)	Baccalaureate, 10 am - Elmen Center Commencement, 2 pm - Arena