

Pause-Ground-Go (Instead of Ready-Aim-Fire)– Fourth in series on Christian Intimacy

Ephesians 6:10-20(ESV)

Saint Marks United Methodist Church, Charleston, WV

13th Sunday after Pentecost (August 23) 2015

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; ¹⁷ and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, ¹⁸ praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, ¹⁹ and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

“If somebody attacks your country, then you need to make sure they don’t think you are weak. You must strike back. Shame on you, America, for letting them think you were weak enough to get away with it, to begin with.”

“ATTACK MY COUNTRY AND YOU’D BETTER KNOW OUR RESPONSE: READY, AIM, FIRE!!”

So goes the popular mantra of American foreign policy that has been in vogue for a very long time. And it is not only American foreign policy that espouses such a belief.

HOWEVER, today, and for the past three weeks, and concluding with next Sunday, we are NOT talking about American foreign policy. We are talking about CHRISTIAN INTIMACY.

So WITHOUT REGARD TO, NOR CONSIDERATION OF AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY, and ONLY in terms of Intimacy within the Body of Christ – which is the Church, and which is our PRIMARY MISSION let me ask you to **PLEASE PRESS THE PAUSE BUTTON.**

Without regard to foreign policy, when you are attacked personally – whether physically, emotionally, reputation-wise, psychically, whatever, ... **PLEASE PRESS THE PAUSE BUTTON.**

Being a Christian ... living in the intimacy of Christian Community ...not only ALLOWS ... but also EMPOWERS us to STOP. And not just do the first thing that pops into your mind.

Somebody slaps you on the cheek, and what is the first response. Slap them back. But Jesus says? [Turn the other cheek.] If you are going to do that, you must first HIT THE PAUSE BUTTON and consider other options.

When someone slaps you, STOP. There are other options. Get GROUNDED.

What are our foundations? What are the fundamentals of what we are about.

Paul gives some of them to us in the Epistle lesson today:

- ❖ Truth
- ❖ Righteousness
- ❖ Gospel of PEACE
- ❖ Faith
- ❖ Salvation
- ❖ Word of God.

All of our foundational beliefs are based on the BUILDING UP and not TEARING DOWN.

STOP. Get GROUNDED. And then GO ... Go, be the AMBASSADOR OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD we are called to be.

Richard Stearns, President of *World Vision*, recently wrote in an article for THE HISTORY channel (of all places?)

In a recent article titled, "[He's Jesus Christ](#)," *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof took his readers to the Nuba mountains in Sudan and showed them a man who exemplifies Christ himself. In this region that is under constant bombardment from the country's air force as they battle a rebel army, it is the civilians who pay the price, and they would have little hope if it weren't for Dr. Tom. This Catholic missionary doctor pulls out shrapnel, amputates limbs, delivers babies, and performs appendectomies among the half million people who live close enough to the hospital to seek services there. And he does this work without electricity, running water, or even a telephone.

The local Muslim community is incredibly thankful for Dr. Tom. The chief praised him by saying simply, "He's Jesus Christ." Kristof writes, "The chief explained that Jesus healed the sick, made the blind see and helped the lame walk -- and that is what Dr. Tom does every day."

Jesus Christ is living in the Nuba mountains and winning the hearts of the local Muslims. That's the Jesus everybody loves. He is as appealing to Americans as he is to Muslims in the Nuba mountains.

In his newest book, [A Path Appears](#), Kristof tells the story of Willow Creek Church, near Chicago, which had just put together more than half a million packages of seeds for Zimbabwean women farmers. A FedEx driver discovered one package in the parking lot. When the driver learned what it was and how those seeds could help fight global poverty, she told the receptionist, "I'm not a member of any church, and

I don't think about religion very much. But I think this is the kind of church I'd like to belong to."

Kristof himself -- who says he's "not particularly religious" -- is often captivated by the committed believers he finds doing Jesus' work in some of the most remote places on earth. "Go to the front lines," Kristof wrote in 2011, "in the battles against hunger, malaria, prison rape, obstetric fistula, human trafficking or genocide, and some of the bravest people you meet are evangelical Christians (or conservative Catholics, similar in many ways) who truly live their faith."

But this isn't the Jesus Christians usually display in America. An unintended consequence of the culture war is that many Christians are known for what they stand against rather than what they stand for. One Barna study found that younger Americans view Christians as hypocritical, judgmental, old-fashioned, and overly involved in politics. Only three percent of 16-29 year olds in the 2007 study had a positive view of [us].

Our job isn't to make America look like Jesus. Our job is to look so much like Jesus that America says, "Wow!"

Listen again to the words of scripture we heard read today:

We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil.... (verse 11)

When you fight against evil, you cannot become evil and hope to win.

The Rev'd Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote, taught, lived, and died this principle: ***The ends never justifies the means; the ends are the means in the process of becoming.***

We fight evil by building up what is good.

Again, I am not talking about American foreign policy here; that might find its place in another sermon. I AM however talking about how we treat one another in the Body of Christ.

It may indeed be a sin to give offense to others. But the Body of Christ is damaged more so, quite often, by the people who seem to always be TAKING OFFENSE.

The next time someone hurts you, or hurts your feelings:

- ❖ PAUSE – you don't have to do the first thing that comes to your mind. You have a free will. You are more than a fish who sees, is hungry, and bites.
- ❖ GROUND – Remember who you are, whose you are, and what are the principles of BUILDING UP to which you are called. You are a beloved child of God MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD. Remember that.
- ❖ GO with all the tools of the Good News, building up, not tearing down. The best way to defeat tools of evil is NOT TO STRIKE THE PERSON UNDER THE INFLUENCE, but to build up the alternative.

We are NOT FIGHTING AGAINST FLESH AND BLOOD. Don't attack back. Build up, instead.

- ❖ PAUSE
- ❖ GROUND
- ❖ GO

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN