

Lenten Fast from Violence 2006:

Week 5

FASTING FROM THE VIOLENCE OF SYSTEMS - MEDIA

Freedom and democracy in the United States rest, in part, on a free press and on a rich exchange of ideas and positions. Through the years, however, there has been an increasing conglomeration of media with the buying of newspapers, television and radio stations by large multi-national corporations whose purposes are often varied and which are largely focused on the bottom line. As a result, there seem to be fewer viewpoints and positions reflected in the news that Americans receive and much of that news is solely from the viewpoint of American political and social interests. While Americans remain focused on news within the U.S., except in cases of war and natural disasters, many citizens of other countries know not only what is happening in the U.S., but also have a different view about world events. This means that Americans are often ignorant about how we are perceived by others in the world and about how world events are seen by others.

A case in point might be the Iraq war, where tens of millions of citizens around the world, including many of the world's largest Christian churches, believed that there were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and that therefore the U.S. should not invade Iraq, yet many Americans were not aware of these sentiments or did not believe them to be an important consideration. Whether we support the war or not, we have a responsibility, as citizens of the world's only super-power, to have the broadest possible knowledge of our world and how we are perceived in it .

Similarly, many citizens of the world are very much engaged in a political/economic conversation about the positives and negatives of globalization, while many Americans remain unaware of this larger discussion because it has received only limited coverage in much of the American media. In a world where more than a billion persons live on less than \$2 a day, Americans, as citizens in the richest nation in the world, have an obligation to understand this complex concept and how it impacts both Americans workers and farmers as well as how it impacts the rest of the world.

Theological basis

Many centuries ago the prophet Habakkuk wrote:

O Lord, how long shall I cry for help and you not listen?
Or cry to you "Violence!" and you will not save?

Why do you make me see wrong doing and look at trouble?
Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise.
So the law becomes slack and justice never prevails.

A few verses later, at the beginning of Chapter 2, he added:

I will stand at my watchpost and station myself on the rampart;
I will keep watch to see what he will say to me,
and what he will answer concerning my complaint.
Then the Lord answered me and said:
Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it.

Many in the world, in Sudan where the genocide of Darfur continues unabated despite the statements by governments of the world that they would never again allow genocide or those dying from HIV/AIDS in Africa while medicines remain unavailable to the poorest of the poor and where a whole generation of human beings is being lost and the next generation is imperiled as they are made orphans and seem to be forgotten by the world, cry out how long shall we cry out for help and you would not listen. Part of the reason we can not listen is that we do not receive adequate news and information on the plight of the “least of the these” in our world.

We, therefore, are being called to the watchposts of the world, to be stationed and to keep watch, to tell the stories of the people around the world who are suffering.

Actions and Advocacy

Sometimes we feel paralyzed by the enormity of the injustices of the world and wonder what can we do. But there are steps that we can take to make the world a more just world.

First, we can become knowledgeable about the issues facing the world, including world poverty and the impact of war on the lives of many of the citizens of the world. But to really understand the viewpoints of the world and to become engaged in a worldwide conversation about justice, we must begin to reach out further than U.S. media.

For one month, discipline yourself to watch television news from a variety of viewpoints – U.S. network news, U.S. public television news and also the news as presented by the British Broadcasting System or the Canadian Broadcasting System. Often the BBC or the CBC are carried on television by cable networks or you can listen to them on the radio, usually on National Public Radio channels. Compare how they cover the world’s stories about war, peace, globalization and human rights with how American media cover the stories. Read not only your local newspaper, but also the New York Times and the Washington Post. Then read newspapers from London or Australia or Canada and compare how they cover the same stories. You can find international papers in your library or you can go online and find most of them.

One issue which much of the rest of the world disagrees with Americans on is the death penalty. The recent execution of Stanley “Tookie” Williams pointed how most of our historical allies believe that the death penalty is barbaric yet many Americans support it. The Williams case in particular raised questions for many Christians about repentance and forgiveness. Read the news accounts of the Stanley Williams case from the U.S. and from other nations. Have a conversation in your own church about the death penalty and about repentance and forgiveness.

While many video games are shown to be violent, there are beginning to be developed peaceful games. One such game, Food Force, was introduced by the United Nations World Food Program this year. It has become the second-most downloaded free internet game and is teaching millions of young people (and maybe some not-so young) about the challenges of providing food for all of the world’s people. Download Food Force (www.food-force.com) and use it with your church’s youth group to engage in discussion about world poverty and how we can end extreme poverty in our lifetime.

A Litany for the End of Violence in Our World

Leader: O Lord, Creator of life and love, we come to you with grateful hearts. For you have given us all that we need, all that we have. You gave us a planet which could sustain us and nourish us for all generations. You have given us each other, made in your own image. And we give you thanks.

People: Open our eyes to your generosity, O God.

L: Yet with all that you have given so freely, O Lord, we confess that we have not loved your creation or each other with our whole hearts. We confess that we have done violence to the creation and to each other.

P: Open our eyes to our sinfulness, O God.

L: So often we see the world, your world, only through our own narrow lenses, O God. Help us to see the world as you would have us see it. Help us to shed our own particularities so that we might become one, O Lord.

P: Open our hearts to your love, O God.

L: So often we have used your gift of creativity to create more violence, more hatred, more distrust in the world. So often we have closed our ears and our hearts to the pleas of those who cry out for justice. Fill us with your mercy and your kindness, O Lord.

P: Open our minds to new insights, O God.

L: Help us to see that violence takes many forms in this world, O Lord. Help us to have the courage to confront it, to change it, to end it in our own lives, in our own communities, in our own homes and in this, your world.

P: Grant us your peace, O God.

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