

[1] The Trial
Mark 15:1-15

This is an adaptation of a sermon originally prepared for Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Burnsville, MN, March 14-15, 2015. <http://popmn.org/worship/changing-church/>

Are any of you baseball fans? A while back my husband Jeff and I watched the movie “42” the story about Jackie Robinson.

Jackie Robinson gained national recognition in 1941 when he became the first athlete in the history of UCLA to earn a letter in four different sports in the same year (football, basketball, track and baseball). Drafted into the Army, he was discharged in 1945 and joined the Kansas City Monarchs of the American Negro League. That same year the general manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers, a man named Branch Rickey, invited Robinson to New York City for a meeting. Robinson had no idea he was about to be asked to become the first Black player in major league baseball.

Their meeting lasted nearly three hours. Branch Rickey grilled the twenty-six year old Robinson. He wanted to know if Robinson had the resolve to face the challenges he would meet both on and off the field.

“The opposition will shout insults, come in spikes first, throw pitches at your head,” Rickey thundered.

‘Mr. Rickey,’ Robinson said, ‘they’ve been throwing at my head for a long time.’

Rickey’s voice rose, “Suppose I’m a player and in the heat of an important ball game I collide with you at second base. When I get up I call you every dirty name in the book. What do you do?”

“Mr. Rickey,” Robinson murmured, “do you want a ballplayer who’s afraid to fight back?”

“I want a ballplayer with guts enough **not** to fight back!” Rickey exclaimed almost savagely. He paced across the floor and returned

with finger pointing. ‘You’ve got to do this job with base hits and stolen bases and fielding ground balls, Jackie. Nothing else!’

Branch Rickey moved from behind his big desk and got in Robinson’s face, “It’s the World Series and I’m playing against you. I’m a hotheaded player and I want to win the game and so I go into you spikes first, but you don’t give ground. You stand there and you jab the ball into my ribs and the umpire yells, ‘Out!’ I flare up - all I see is your face - that black face right on top of me. And so I haul off and punch you right in the cheek.” Rickey’s oversized fist swung through the air and barely missed Robinson’s face. Robinson blinked, but his head never moved.

“What do you do?” Rickey roared.

“Mr. Rickey,” he whispered, “I’d turn the other cheek.”

Jackie Robinson started for the Dodgers in 1947. He faced everything Branch Rickey said he would, and more. Jackie Robinson swung the bat, but he never swung his fists. He caught fly balls, but he never let his words fly. His character, his use of non-violence and his remarkable talent not only changed baseball forever, but contributed significantly to the Civil Rights Movement. In fact, few people realize that after baseball, Robinson went on to be a leader in the civil rights movement.

Jackie Robinson, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., Nelson Mandela...just a few of the revolutionaries who changed the world, not with violence but with the power of non-violence.

[8 and 11] This morning we heard the story of the ultimate revolutionary who, when confronted by violence chose the path of non-violence and changed the world.

[10:00] As we continue our Lenten journey we’re going to hear the story of the ultimate revolutionary who, when confronted by violence, chose the path of non-violence and changed the world.

[READ MARK 15:1-15].

Everyone in this story wants something, but did you notice how they go about getting what they want?

- Pilate wants to avoid a riot. His job was to keep the peace, and so he used his power to have Jesus executed.
- The religious leaders were jealous of Jesus' popularity, and so they used their power to hand him over to Pilate.
- Barabbas wanted to set Israel free from Roman occupation, and so he resorted to violence and murder.
- Jesus wanted to set the world free from sin and death, but though he had more power than Pilate, the religious leaders or Barabbas could fathom, Jesus chose to set his power aside. Jesus chose non-violence.

But don't miss the point here. The people want revolution. The people want change. And when the people had the choice between Barabbas and Jesus, they chose Barabbas. They chose the way of violence. They rejected Jesus and the pathway of non-violence. And we, as a human species, have been making that same, sinful choice ever since. You take from me, I take from you. You hit me, I hit you back. You wound me with your words, I wound you with my words. We fight and I fight to win. That's the way of violence.

It's an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. That's the choice of the world. **But that is not the way of Jesus.** We are a people called to live a different way. We are a people called to turn the other cheek.

This is a Chinese Finger Trap. Legend has it that ancient Chinese Emperors would select their officials based on how they responded to this little toy. Those who pulled harder, grew angry and got stuck in the tightening trap were thought unworthy to serve in the Empire, while candidates who remained calm and escaped the trap got the job.

I think this Finger Trap holds an important lesson about living like Jesus. When someone wrongs us or hurts our feelings we tend to pull away. We tend to want to strike back. Or when we're in an argument we pull away by trying to win, to prove that we're right.

But like the Finger Trap, pulling away only traps us further. The more we pull away from one another, the more we strike out at one another, the more our emotions escalate and the conflict grows. But when someone stops the cycle of violence, when someone chooses to move toward their adversary instead of pulling away, peace and real change are possible.

This past week, there was a horrible act of violence in Wausau. For me, the one bright spot in the wake of this tragedy is the powerful statement written by Scott Sann, the husband of Sarah Quirt Sann, the Lawyer who died in the incident. In his statement Sann urged “be the bigger people.” He pleaded with people to focus on love, respect and hope and not get caught up in hate and anger.

So, how do we do that? We follow the example of Jesus.

I want to share with you a simple way to live the way of Jesus in your relationships. It’s just three familiar words: stop, drop and role. If you’re on fire that’s a way to put the fire out, and I’d like to suggest to you that it’s also a great way to put out the fire of conflict in your relationships.

First, stop. Stop trying to prove your point. Stop trying to win the argument. Stop trying to hurt the other person with your words. Just stop.

Second, drop. Drop the volume of your voice. Drop your ego. Drop your need to win. Drop your level of emotion. I find by far the most effective way to do this is to take a deep breath. You might want to think about that deep breath as taking in the power of Holy Spirit, because you’re going to need the Spirit for the third step...

Role. I don’t mean like rolling on the floor...though that might defuse the conflict with some humor. I mean change your role r.o.l.e. Rather than being an adversary, caught up in your own thoughts and feelings, step into the shoes of the other person. Seek to really understand what they’re saying, what they really want or

need. This is empathy, and it's hard. That's why you need the Spirit. But it changes things.

There is this crazy video clip on YouTube called "It's not about the nail." In the video a woman with a nail sticking out of her forehead is talking. She is expressing frustration to her husband that he doesn't understand her difficulties and he's always trying to fix things. She tells him "don't try to fix it. I just need you to listen." He starts to argue with her and tells her "if you just got rid of the nail." She blows up and says "It's not about the nail." So, he sits back, takes a deep breath and says, "It must be really hard." You can tell by the change in her body language and the tone of her voice that she feels understood, she even thanks him for listening.

You see, he finally stopped trying to fix it, trying to prove his point, and instead practiced "stop, drop and role". And things changed. That's the way of Jesus.

Too often we try to fix situations, solve problems, prove our point and project our ways on others. But what we really need to do is stop, drop and role and then things change. That's the way of Jesus.

You may not see yourself as a Jackie Robinson, or Nelson Mandela, but you've been called and empowered to be a revolutionary, to change the world one relationship at a time with the reconciling love of Jesus Christ. This week, exercise your revolutionary power. Don't follow the crowds. Follow the way of Jesus. Stop. Drop and role.

VIDEO CLIP: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-4EDhdAHrOg>