

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

If you've ever wondered what it would be like to live in Wisconsin or Minnesota or North Dakota—NOW you know! But, it's not only Mother Nature that seems to be playing with us. It seems to me that those who compiled our Lectionary for the year decided to play with us too.

Remember last week, they had the Lord telling us that we are “the salt of the earth”; “the light of the world”. Now they choose for our text today Him telling us that we're going to hell if we get angry at each other and call each other “a fool” or Raqa”, loosely translated as “a numbskull”. He tells us that we'll surely go to hell if we just look lustfully at another or if we swear or we're dishonest.

I liked last week's Scripture a whole lot better, didn't you? But, whether we like it or not, we can't get around this one.

Jesus is telling us that if we are to be “the salt of the earth”; “the light of the world”, we are called to live by a higher moral standard than “the scribes and the Pharisees” who were sticklers to the law, preoccupied with the most minute details and slavish obedience to them. He brushes aside such fundamentalism, not by encouraging us to ignore the law, but to interpret it by the behaviors that come from within our own hearts and minds.

By calling us to this higher standard by avoiding anger, abolishing lustful desires and committing ourselves to honest speech, we would not only improve our own personal morality, but, if all, who would be His disciples, did so, what a wonderful world it would be. Think about it! The commitment to anger avoidance would mean non-violence in our midst and hence no more war, no more terrorism, no more shootings in our schools or shopping malls. The commitment to purity of heart would mean an end to pornography, prostitution, sexual exploitation, and marital infidelity. The commitment to truth-telling would mean integrity in business, government, and all other areas of human interaction. What a social revolution we could bring about!

Jesus really was a social revolutionary! He wanted to turn things around. But, his is a completely non-violent revolution. Jesus' revolution involves a turnaround in the hearts and minds of those who would be his followers. He believes if we can change our ways, we can change our world.

In my youth I believed that! That's why I became a priest. I wanted to follow Jesus with my whole heart and, together, with Him, I wanted to change the world. I really believed it was possible—to end racism, to end abortion, to end every form of injustice and hatefulness and evil.

Now that I'm an old man, I still believe it. I still believe it's possible. I still believe in the Jesus Revolution. I've just learned it's a whole lot harder than I thought it would be when I was young. Because after all these years, I still get up every morning, look in the mirror and recognize how short I've come in turning my own self around.

As I look at this tired old face, day after day, I begin to mouth the words of the song, "Let there be peace on earth. Let it begin with me. Let there be peace on earth. The peace that was meant to be...Let peace begin with me. Let this be the moment now. With every step I take, let this be my solemn vow. To take each moment and live each moment with peace eternally. Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me."

Each day I struggle to live up to this, my anthem of the Jesus Revolution. Every day I still fall short. But I'm still trying. I still believe. I hope you do too.