

The Irresistible Revolution
Living As an Ordinary Radical
6 pm Thursdays, March 7 – April 11
Meeting at St. Andrew Episcopal Church

Session Five – April 4
Chapters 10-11

Ch 10 – Extremists for Love

“Growing up, I was told that good people go to church. And then I looked around and watched the news and found a church full of sick people and a world that had some decent pagans. And I studied sociology. My studies taught me that the higher a person’s frequency of church attendance, the more likely they are to be sexist, racist, anti-gay, pro-military, and committed to their local church. And I figured that if that’s what it means to be a Christian, I wasn’t sure I wanted to be one, or whether even Jesus would want to be one, for that matter. I wondered why Jesus didn’t take back his religion. As I’ve heard my old mentor Tony Campolo say, ‘If we were to set out to establish a religion in polar opposition to the Beatitudes Jesus taught, it would look strikingly similar to the pop Christianity that has taken over the airwaves of North America.’” P257

In preparing a video for a worship service Shane asks people on the street to do word association. They ask for the first word that comes to mind at the words Snow, Eagle, Teenagers, and finally, Christian. The responses were Fake, Hypocrites, Church, Boring, and Used-ta-be-one. No one said Love or Grace. A prominent research company set out to find perceptions of Christians and the top three answers were (1) Anti-Gay, (2) Judgmental, and (3)

Hypocritical. Love did not make the list of responses.

“The greatest cause of atheism is Christians who acknowledge Jesus with their lips, then walk out the door and deny him with their lifestyle. That is what an unbelieving world simply finds unbelievable.” -Brennan Manning.

“These are extreme times, the question is not whether we will be extremists, but what kind of extremists we will be. Will we be extremists for hate or for love?” -MLK

Shane then tells the story of Saul of Tarsus, who was a distinguished Pharisee in charge of imprisoning and killing Christians until his conversion. Saul is now known more as Paul, ‘an extremists for Grace, writing so eloquently of God’s love for sinners, of whom he counts himself the Chief.’ P260

Shane tells the story of the disciple James, who converts his executioner with his message of Love and Grace, so that the executioner is executed right along-side James. Of Dirk Willems who was set for execution in Holland for his faith in the 1500s. He escaped, and crossing a frozen lake he heard a crack and saw that his pursuer had fallen through the ice. Dirk rescued his pursuer, and was executed

despite the prison guards pleas to spare him. He tells the story of St. Francis during the 5th crusade, when Francis had set out as a soldier before a vision came to him of loving his enemies. The Sultan of the Byzantine Muslims had offered a gold piece to anyone who could bring him the head of a Christian after diplomatic relations were cut off, but Francis took the dangerous journey to present himself to the sultan. He was captured and beaten and dragged in chains before the Sultan. Francis spoke of Love and Grace, and the Sultan was moved and offered to send Francis away with Riches, which Francis refused, but he did accept an Ivory Horn which was used for the Muslim Call to Prayer, which Francis later used to summon his own community to prayer at Assisi. The horn is still there. The Sultan became known for his extraordinary care of Christian prisoners.

“To our most bitter opponents we say: Throw us in jail and we will still love you. Bomb our houses and threaten our children and we will still love you. Beat us and leave us half dead and we will still love you. But be ye assured that we will wear you down by our capacity to suffer. One day we shall so appeal to your heart and conscience that we shall win you in the process, and our victory will be a double victory.” -MLK

In Iraq at a worship service Shane hears a pastor tell the story of a woman who's Son and Husband were killed by a police officer, who was later brought to trial. At the sentencing of the officer the woman spoke: 'He took my family away from me, and I still have a lot of love to give, and he needs to know what love and grace feel like

– so I think he should have to come to visit my home in the slums, twice a month, and spend time with me, so that I can be a mother to him, so that I can embrace him, and he can know that my forgiveness is real.’ The pastor urged the Iraqi congregation and their international friends to love those who persecute them – Both America and their own government. P264

In the pediatric ward of an Iraqi hospital: “I saw a little girl shaking in her bed, asking over and over, ‘What did I do to America? What did I do to America?’ I saw a father hold his child, whose body was specked with missile fragments and heard him say, ‘What kind of liberation would do this to my child? If this is liberation, then we do not want it. If this is democracy, they can keep it.’ The doctors had tears in their eyes as they explained that they had not slept in days and had seen over a hundred casualties in the first three hours. Amid all the horror, the manager of the hospital said something that I will never forget: ‘Violence is for those who have lost their imagination.’ P265

‘Jesus abhors both passivity and violence.’

“Walter Wink does brilliant work demonstrating Jesus’ creativity in his teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. Talking about the familiar turn the other cheek verses, Wink points out that Jesus is not just suggesting that we masochistically let people step all over us. Instead, Jesus is pointing us toward something that imaginatively disarms others. When hit on the cheek, turn and look the person in the eye. Do not cower and do not punch them back. Make sure they look into your eyes

and see your sacred humanity, and it will become increasingly hard for them to hurt you. When someone tries to sue you for the coat on your back and drags you before the court, go ahead and take all of your clothes off and hand them over, exposing the sickness of their greed. When a soldier asks you to walk a mile with them and carry their pack (as was Roman custom), don't throw your fist in the air like the Zealots, just walk with them two miles instead of one, talk with them and woo them... by your love." P267

"We can look into the eyes of a centurion and see not a beast but a child, and then walk with that child a couple of miles. Look into the eyes of tax collectors as they sue you in court. See their poverty and give them your coat. Look into the eyes of the ones who are hardest for you to like, and see the One you love." P268

"Criminologist teach that one of the quickest ways to diffuse violence is with surprise. Those who commit violence depend on the predictability of the victims. When victims do something that surprises them, it throws the whole plan out of wack... There's that time the soldiers come to arrest Jesus, and Peter pulls out a sword and cuts off a guy's ear... Jesus rebukes him and then grabs the dude's ear and puts it back on. That must have been a little

awkward for everyone, especially the soldiers. How do you arrest a guy who just put your buddy's ear back on?" P269

"We get another glimpse of extreme love in the musical *Les Miserables*, in which a priest allows a vagrant, Jean Valjean, to stay in his home, only to get knocked unconscious and be robbed. The next day, the authorities catch Jean Valjean and drag him before the priest. They say Valjean claimed that the priest had given him the silver goods in his bag. And the priest instinctively, beautifully, says, "I am so thankful you have come back, as you forgot the candlesticks." And as the guards release Jean Valjean, the priest whispers in his ear, "With this, I have ransomed your soul." P271

"The only thing that takes more work, tears, and sweat than division is reconciliation." P272

"We have placed such idolatrous faith in our ability to protect ourselves that we call it more courageous to die killing than to die loving. The faith we have in the market and in the imagination we employ to acquire wealth has so far surpassed our ingenuity to share that we cannot help but wonder if the contemporary gospel remains good news to the poor..." P273

Ch 11 – Making Revolution Irresistible

"Dumbfounded and outraged by the apathy of the church, I've at times gravitated toward circles of social dissenters, protesters, and activists. We've shouted at

the system that was hurting so many of our friends, and we've yelled at the church to wake up. But I saw very little fruit from those days... My hopes for a perfect

revolution were dashed by human imperfection. Among my activist friends, I began to feel a self-righteousness mirroring that of conservative Christianity. I felt an aggressiveness and judgmentalism reminiscent of that which I had grown to despise in the church.” P277

“But then I discovered a different kind of protest. Years ago, I attended a rally against sweatshops overseas. The organizers had not invited the typical rally speakers – lawyers, activists, academics. Instead, they brought the kids themselves from sweatshops to speak. I listened when a child from Indonesia stood to share and pointed to the giant scar on his face. ‘I got this scar when my master lashed me for not working hard enough. When it began to bleed, he did not want me to stop working or to ruin the cloth in front of me, so he took a lighter and burned it shut. I got this making stuff for you.’ I was suddenly consumed by the overwhelming reality of the suffering body of Christ. Jesus now bore not just the marks from the nails and scars from the thorns but a gash down his face, for when we have done it to the ‘least of these,’... Poverty had become personal. And that messes with you.” P278

“Don’t choose issues; choose people. Come play in fire hydrants in North Philly. Fall in love with a group of people who are marginalized and suffering, and then you won’t have to worry about which cause you need to protest. Then the issues will choose you.” P279

“While most activists could use a good dose of gentleness (after all, it is a fruit of the spirit), I think most believers could use a good dose of holy anger.” P280

“Gandhi said that if he had to choose between a violent person and a coward, he would choose the violent person. For a violent person can be taught to love, but very little can be done with a coward.” P287

“Let me say, at the risk of seeming ridiculous, that the true revolutionary is guided by great feelings of love” -Che Guevara.

“Just as believers are a dime a dozen in the church, so are activists in social justice circles nowadays. But lovers are hard to come by. And I think that’s what our world is desperately in need of – lovers.” P287

Shane tells the story of humanizing ‘causes’ like holding an appreciation day at his college for Housekeepers, so that the students would clean that day and let the cleaning staff have a paid day off. One day the president of the university attending a dinner with a housekeeper who didn’t have a living wage at the university and the president began advocating for one soon after the dinner. Shane tells of farm workers driving through cities in Florida from their fields to the Growers association in Orlando to protest working conditions. They had a 14 foot tall statue of liberty holding a bucket and a tomato. When they reached Orlando they were told they could not drive the statue into the city. The workers said, “So we will carry her.” “So each of us grabbed a corner and hoisted her up on our shoulders, and we began walking, taking turns. One of the mighty women who helped carry the statue whispered, “If Jesus can carry that cross, we can carry this statue.” P284

Shane also tells the story of the School of the Americas where the US military trains soldiers from Latin America. Graduates of

the school have been some of the most notorious criminals and leaders of Latin America, committing atrocities among poor and religious leaders. “Each year over ten thousand folks gather for a silent procession onto the property, simply holding white crosses with the names of the thousands who have lost their lives... Each name is read aloud and everyone responds, ‘Presente’ (present)” P288

He tells the story of Rizpah from 2 Samuel 21:1-14. In that story King David sacrifices Rizpah’s sons as a sacrifice to heal the famine that cursed Israel. The children are killed and left on a hill, exposed, left to be devoured by wild animals. Rizpah camps on sack cloth beside the bodies for what seems to be a whole season, weeks and weeks. She protects the bodies from wild animals. And the land is not healed. Word of her encampment spreads all the way to the king. He was moved, and he gathered up the bones of the dead. ‘Human suffering has the power to move even kings to feel again.’ Only then is the land healed.

“Protesters are everywhere, but I think the world is desperately in need of prophets,

those little voices that can point us toward another future.” P295

“In many ways, protesters fit into the dominant system, legitimizing the current order with carefully compartmentalized dissent. A one-dimensional society can absorb dissent in a way that even further empowers its domination. People watch it on TV and know that they are not ‘one of those’ and teach their kids the comfort of slavery rather than the slavery of comfort.” P296

“Whenever people talk about injustice, usually there is a cloud of guilt looming over them. Joy and celebration don’t usually mark progressive social justice circles, or conservative Christian circles, for that matter. But the Jesus movement is a revolution that dances. Celebration is at the very core of our kingdom, and hopefully that celebration will make its way into the darkest corners of our world... May the whispers of hope reach the ears of hope-hungry people in the shadows of our world.” P300