

“They want us cowed.”

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“Defining Terrorism”

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Isis. Al-Qaeda. Boko Haram. Hamas. Domestic right-wing militias. Taliban. Name your poison. Who isn't fed up with these terrorist organizations? Who isn't fed up with pathetic loners with bent souls threatening to blow up buildings in our capital unless demands are met? I remember how those of us who protested the Vietnam War found the cause for peace undermined by bombings instigated by the Weathermen. I've never known blood to wipe up blood. Neither let us mistake pacifism with passivity. Peace simply is far more practical.

Children's sermons during worship can be harder to craft than composing an adult sermon. Many children's talks rely on object lessons which can be lost upon or confuse the littler children. One children's talk I have used for older kids involved asking them to curl their hand into a fist and keep it tight. Then I offered them the communion cup. They found it very difficult to hold the cup with fists. Equally difficult is to shake someone's outstretched hand when your hand is a fist. Why do we shake hands? Its origin, at least three millenniums ago, was a symbolic gesture of peace, an oath and promise of peace. Hands that clasp make it powerless to wield sword or knife.

Is there a time when violence, although never justified, may be necessary? World War II was a defensive war. There's a big difference between instigators and those forced to defend themselves or vulnerable others. A long time ago, we took my mother-in-law to see the movie “Gandhi.” She grew up in colonial India during the days of the British Raj. She was disappointed how the movie ended before showing how Gandhi, after years seeking independence from Britain, pleaded with Viceroy Mountbatten to keep the British in India. Gandhi feared what did happen once the British left: violence between Hindus and Moslems.

We've seen terroristic violence before. We'll see it again. The aim of the terrorist is simple because terrorism is a weapon of the weak. They also reveal who they really are when they resort to terrorism. When the Taliban thrashes women in the street or beheads journalists, they show us exactly who they are. I'm just waiting for the Taliban in Afghanistan to starting fracturing and fighting amongst themselves, especially when one group gets upset they're not getting their fair share of the drug money. Any organization that relies on force and cruelty to maintain authority spawns competing forces. I read that somewhere before: those who live by the sword, die by the sword. The cruel sin of it all is that meanwhile innocents suffer because of their aims, their crusades, their convictions, which is what they want and what they like. They actually believe that the evil we call what they do is justified. They pervert what we name as evil as their good. Hatred often masquerades as love of religion, country, cause.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency defines terrorism as “the use of force or violence against persons or property in violation of the criminal laws of the United States for purposes of intimidation, coercion, or ransom. Terrorists often use threats to: Create fear among the public; Try to convince citizens that their government is powerless to prevent terrorism. Get immediate publicity for their causes.”

The FBI describes two types of terrorism: “International terrorism, which include violent, criminal acts committed by individuals and/or groups who are inspired by, or associated with, designated foreign terrorist organizations or nations (state-sponsored); and Domestic terrorism, which includes violent, criminal acts committed by individuals and/or groups to further ideological goals stemming from domestic influences, such as those of a political, religious, social, racial, or environmental nature.”

We know terrorism by what terrorists do. We’ve seen it. We’ve experienced it: assassinations, bombings, innocents maimed, cyber-attacks, attempts at disrupt economy and government, kidnappings and hijackings, harming others with biological or chemical weapons.

The aim of the terrorist is simple because terrorism is a weapon of the failed. Their aim is to destabilize society through intense fear and wanton destruction, making the people feel powerlessness, inciting further violence in response, creating insecurity so the people will distrust those in charge to protect them, and to cause people to be cowed, submissive. They want us cowed. We won’t be. Terrorism is a tool of those who have already lost. I just wish we’d put as much energy, tools, and intelligence in trying to cure the root causes that can produce terrorists as our nation does in preventing terroristic acts.