

## DEALING WITH ADVERSARIES

Sometimes, I think it would be great if there were Not any adversaries....or threats. Then, I realize that life could be pretty boring without some,..... little ones.

So, then I think,.....well,.... wouldn't things be better if all problems / all adversaries were puny and weak.

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Ah, but I regress.

I don't digress, because that's impossible to do in the opening statement.

I regress because, in reality, adults / big people usually have big problems.

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An adversary can be a person, group or a force that opposes or attacks. We call the adversary an enemy or a stressor that is threatening.

This past week, snow was an adversary that had to be dealt with, and before long, the runoff may be another adversary / problem.

We face all sorts of troubles and hazards threats, such as:

the pressure to do well at school, or dealing with a bully or difficult boss.

Quite often, money....or the lack of it, is an intimidating problem, and there are many others.....some much broader than our own personal issues.

For example, Global warming is the consequences of adversarial behavior towards the environment. Governments seem to find enemies and threats, especially when a country won't surrender its sovereignty, land or oil to another nation who believes they are entitled to it.

Subsequently, rhetoric heats up, accusations are made and a huge problem erupts. The citizens are taught to be enemies,.... and the only way to solve the problem seems to be to destroy it.

That choice is called war.

The Big fallacy of war is thinking that the problem is the other guy, the enemy, the "bad guy." And, it is motivated by the myth that problems can be eradicated /destroyed.

Of course, on a personal level, we don't do war against our threats,..... or at least we don't call it that. However, we may at times, buy into the myth that problems can be destroyed / that adversaries can be made to disappear.

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That myth **is** a very appealing illusion.

Destroying the problem would be great.

Here is a huge homework assignment that's due tomorrow

[scrap paper--crinkle paper and toss it]

Here is the credit card statement -- [crinkle paper and toss it]

The mortgage with the bank -- [crinkle paper and toss it] <

That nasty repair bill -- [crinkle paper and toss it]

What else do I have here?

Oh,... another big past due statement -- [crinkle paper and toss it]

And, here's my retirement plan -- [crinkle paper and toss it]

OOPS,..... There always seems to be "collateral damage" when the way of destruction is chosen.

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If only dealing with threats was so easy,.... yet... the paper / the statements were not the problem. They were just representing the problem.

But, if only we could eradicate problems with drone planes, yet assassinating the rep solves nothing.

Well then,..... if only the world was like J.R. R. Tolkien's Middle Earth, occupied by Hobbits, dwarfs, elves and the horrible, worthy to be killed by the thousands,.... ugly orcs. If only....

Yet, even the ultimate orc, Adolf Hitler was merely the representative of the problem. If he didn't exist, then the problem would have spewed out another.

All too frequently, the problem is personified, and the pursuit of destroying the projected problem results in death and destruction.

In recent history, Saddam Hussein in Iraq was labelled the problem, as were the Taliban in Afghanistan, and thousands upon thousands have been killed, and the real problem is still there, our problem.

The American strategy in their Vietnam war was the hideousness goal to simply kill the enemy. Success was measured by the body count, thinking their enemy was the problem, and over two million Vietnamese were killed. Nothing was solved, and much was lost.

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It is critical to know what the "real" problem is, and it is imperative to know that a problem **must be solved**. It can't be destroyed.

And, the quest to terminate a problem isn't always done with brute force.

Sometimes, well meaning individuals, attempt to berate, overwhelm an adversary with facts and sound reasoning,... yet those attempts to erase a problem usually doesn't work,...and often makes things worse.

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So, if a significant, dangerous threat / an adversary can't be made to disappear, does that mean the only recourse is to hide or run away??

NOT at All.

Problems and threats must be confronted in order to solve them.

God does not want us to be victims or slaves.

The Isaiah text presents this counsel:

verse 5 -- I didn't retreat;

verse 6 -- I stood firm / endured;

verse 8 -- states defiance with the "calling out" to the adversary, "Confront me" / bring it on.....

That's bold, vain talk,..... if we ignore the key parts of this message.

Verse 7 declares that strength comes from God, and verse 9 affirms the confidence of knowing God is present and helping.

Big problems usually can NOT be solved by ourselves. We need God's help,..... and..... each other's, too.

Note verses 4 and 8.

Verse 4 asserts that the weary can be sustained with just one word.

I believe that "one word" is WE or US.

Observe the petition in verse 8: "Let us stand together."

"Let us stand together"

With God's help, let us stand together to confront big problems.

Let us all work together to try to solve the threats.

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The Bible teaches that there are many techniques for dealing with adversaries and solving problems, such as hospitality, creative trickery, stories and parables,..... and personally bringing God to the forefront.

This personal approach, carrying the way and message of God, is what Jesus did when he went to Jerusalem.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus dealt with and confronted problems and threats, and Jerusalem was the source of many of those problems / those injustices. The leaders and the system had to be confronted.

Palm Sunday remembers the day Jesus and his disciples "called out" the adversaries. It was the day the son of God came calling.

His entrance into Jerusalem was a message well crafted.

He chose to ride a donkey, or as Luke calls it, a colt.

And notice, Jesus was not alone. His followers were with him, and he even had to ask for help.

He borrowed the colt.

The leaders in Jerusalem would have understood the meaning of him riding on a colt, and the revelry by his followers obviously got people's attention and created a stir.

The leaders felt threatened by Jesus. I suppose they feared Jesus' justice message, and were afraid that they could lose power if people listened to Jesus.

They believed that Jesus and his followers were a threat / the problem, so they applied the myth mentality, and tried to eradicate the problem.

Some of the Pharisees told Jesus to "Order your followers to stop."

They thought that if the followers became quiet, then no one would notice them and Jesus,.. and thus the problem would end.

However, the Pharisees' problem was NOT Jesus and a group cheering people.

Their problem was much bigger than that.

The conflict between their way and the way of God was being confronted. God's son was living, bringing that way, and he was there in the flesh. This was huge.

As Jesus stressed to them, "If my followers became silent, then the stones would shout out." God was coming to Them!

[notice the stones....watching over us, waiting to shout out]

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Jesus, blessed by God, came to Jerusalem with his friends.

Yet,..... those "followers of Christ" turned out to be merely "good time" followers.

When Jesus cleaned out the temple, he was alone. Apparently, the followers of Christ were content to let Jesus do all the dirty work of solving the problem.

And, nearly all evaporated away when Jesus was arrested and put on trial. The leaders decided to destroy what they thought was the problem.

Ah, but I progress.....beyond Palm Sunday.

Nevertheless, it is more than wrong to let a few brave souls stand alone to face threats and injustices.

Yet, most of us are content to let others pay the cost.

In addition, it is off-track and limited thinking to assume that God will destroy our problems for us,.... without our participation.

Yet, there are many silent prayers made by those in hiding, asking God to end the threats and to destroy the adversaries.

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We are called to be in this together. Our journey to salvation is not done for us, but with us.

God is with us through the difficulties, and we need each others' help, too.

Great problems and strong adversaries are solved when people unite and confront the threats, without using violence.

Ghandi was not alone. The Berlin Wall was not torn down by one person. People standing up and non-violently confronting injustices really does work.

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It works even on a smaller scale.

A few years ago, anti-Semitism became an ugly threat in a small town in South Dakota.

A Jewish family had recently moved into that town, and it wasn't long after that, when someone or a small group spray painted the star of David on the family's car.

The family chose to ignore the racist vandalism; however, a week or so later, a star of David was painted on their home, along with offensive, degrading words.

Alone, with no other Jewish people in the town, the family risked going to the two churches in town for help.

They knew they couldn't confront this threat by themselves.

The two pastors agreed upon a responsive action.

That following Sunday all the members of the churches were given something to take home and place it their windows.

They were given large sheets of paper with the star of David printed on it. By Sunday evening, most of the homes in the town had the star of David emblem on display, boldly declaring, "I am with the persecuted. Deal with me, too."

The problem was solved.

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Let us all seek God's counsel,..... and rally together in the way of Christ.

Let us confront threats and problems together, and always, always ask each other for help.

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Jesus' entrance to Jerusalem invites us to look for Christ confronting adversaries and threats, today.

Is Jesus and his followers confronting the problems we face or are we alone?

Would we find Jesus marching with those who are "Idle no more?"

Would we see Jesus walking up the Capital steps in Washington demanding real Gun control?

Is Jesus riding the buses in India?

Would we discover Jesus confronting the corporations that are greedily destroying the land.

Would Jesus be found calling out Parliament to do justice and let information flow freely?

Would we recognize Jesus standing next to the victim in Steubenville, Ohio,..... and with stupid attackers?

Would we be with Jesus lobbying for better treatment and help for the poor and for more just economic policies?

If today was the day that Jesus came to town, would we be there for the parade, and would we be there, later on, when Jesus confronts the issues?

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When we retreat, when we hide or remain silent, we are not only abandoning the brave and faithful, but we are also empowering the problem and the threats,..... and when that happens,. the chances increase that someone will die,..... in more ways than one.