

The other day a friend posed this question: Is non-violence a viable strategy to help Muslims see Jesus?

The answer lies in my experience, which shattered long-held prejudices and suggested something entirely different...

For five brief, but powerful days, I found myself in Saudi Arabia, talking to Muslims about one thing - non-violence and Jesus. Yeah, I know, that sounds like two things, but that's my point - they became one. Without exception, everyone I met in Jeddah engaged in conversations about non-violence and the teachings of Jesus.

However, the Muslims I know and love either question or flatly reject the death and resurrection of Jesus as a historical event and struggle to grasp our Christian concept of atonement. Initially, I found myself deeply conflicted and inexplicably set upon correcting their theology until I realized that maybe I was missing the point! Is Jesus more concerned with a correct set of theological beliefs or with commitment to him? Perhaps making disciples of Muslims, as well as Christians, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists and others means a commitment to non-violence, to the teachings of Jesus, and ultimately, to God. Do I simply explain the life, death and resurrection of Jesus in theological terms, or is there something much more powerful, much simpler at play? Perhaps Jesus didn't come to change God's idea about humanity, but to change humanity's idea about God?

Centuries of violence and untold suffering has resulted from our attempts to define Jesus of Nazareth in theological terms, but he came and turned all our notions of God, all our notions of power, and all our religious rituals on their head. You've heard it said...“But I say, love your enemies!” This dictate to love even our enemies was the inauguration of the Kingdom of God on earth that Jesus proclaimed. He didn't leave us with idle prophetic utterings, but he died—killed by his enemies – not only for his friends, but so that these enemies, and our enemies, would become his friends and our friends, that we would be one, so that God's will would be done on earth as it is in Heaven. It is only when we adopt the love of God and a willingness to admit that it is better to be killed than to kill, that we actually allow ourselves to be disciples of the Messiah Jesus. Non-violence is not a doctrine one accepts, but a commitment to the golden rule and a complete and total submission to our Creator. We don't simply make declarations of peace, but we fight for our neighbor – the oppressed, the poor, the broken. The goal of our relationships to family, friends, and even enemy, are forever transformed.

So is non-violence a viable strategy to share Jesus with our Muslim friends? My suggestion is that we set aside some of our strategies, submit ourselves to God and let our hearts be transformed by the love, mercy and presence of God which interrupted history some 2000 years ago, and culminated in the

life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. We may very well find that the practice of non-violence is a missing key in our service.

The question I now pose – is to myself: How does this privileged, white, oil and gas attorney sitting safely behind his desk move from his own theology of non-violence to enactment?