

02/19/17 7 A

-- In October of 2006, Charles Roberts entered an Amish schoolhouse and shot 10 young girls, killing five of them, before committing suicide. Predictably, it made national headlines.

-- It was considered remarkable mainly because of the reaction of that Amish community. Thirty members of the community attended Roberts' funeral. His wife actually wrote an open letter to the community thanking them for their forgiveness and mercy.

-- A grandmother of one of the victims put it this way: *He had a mother and a wife and a soul and now he's standing before a just God.* She knew it was God's task to judge, not hers.

-- Most people thought this was extraordinary on their account. But this Church community was simply taking Jesus' words in our gospel seriously. They didn't look at this passage as a nearly-impossible "ideal," but a challenge to live out in their everyday lives.

-- More recently, a similar incident took place in a Black Church in South Carolina, when a gunman took the lives of several children. This time, the gunman survived, and has openly said he is not sorry for what he did.

-- The prosecutor has asked for and got the death penalty for Dylan Roof. It will be interesting to see how family members of victims will react from this point forward.

-- We've heard *an eye for an eye* many times in many contexts. It has been quoted to justify many things. But it's important to remember that this Law of Moses was originally given to *limit* violence, not encourage it.

-- Sometimes, payment would be made to a family that had suffered violence to keep it from going on and on. That is often the custom in some predominately Muslim countries even today.

-- This law of tit for tat, though, wasn't perfect, and Jesus recognized that. He went a step further. He called us to resist retaliation in kind. He wasn't

calling for us to be doormats, but he was challenging us to resist evil by different means.

-- By not returning evil for evil, we are refusing to let someone's bad actions control our behavior. This was a lesson that many of the people in the civil rights movement took to heart in my youthful days.

-- Through their nonviolent resistance to evil, often documented on the nightly TV news, they exposed the evil of racism shown in violence. That's exactly what Jesus was speaking about by the examples he gave from his own day (e.g., offering your cloak, carrying two miles, etc.)

-- Exacting revenge and returning evil for evil is not a sign of strength and resolve. In the end, it is a sign of weakness and a lack of imagination. Just look, for instance, at those countries and areas of the world that have been caught in a seemingly unending cycle of violence.

-- Jesus calls us to a better way. He calls us to break the cycle of harboring grudges for past hurts. He challenges communities to stop fighting each other because of their differences.

-- That Amish community in Pennsylvania should not be looked at as an exception to the rule. It should be a model for all of us in how we conduct ourselves when facing evil.

-- Yes, there are times when criminal actions will have to be punished. Even Gandhi realized that Hitler could not be stopped by nonviolent action alone.

-- But the call to resist evil by doing what is good is still present. It is not some pie in the sky ideal. The Amish community figured out how to do that in a horrifying situation. Perhaps we can use our ingenuity to figure out how to act in a similar manner in more ordinary situations.