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Talk on Peace/ Prepared for May 2012 but never given.

I was asked to give a talk on peace and opposition. From the gospel we understand the good that can come through opposition, that it is through working inside of challenges that we are progressed and become better than we are, through adversity that our souls are purified and come to develop virtue in response to difficulty and challenges, and to survive our world. There is so much beauty in our mortal struggle. If I take away your hardship, I take away a significant part of your life. The same burdens we ask today to be removed from us, we would perhaps ask tomorrow, to be returned. Because in working toward our goals through challenges, we have purpose. If God gave everything to us now, if everything we wanted, everything we desired to be, was ours, we would rejoice for a moment. And then we would feel it. A great deal of purpose was in slowly working toward the things we valued, slowly bringing our dreams into reality. This sense of purpose is life.

Please God, bring us back into the journey! Let me work for these things. Let me find worth in the effort I put in. Don't give it all to me now. These are things we would ask of God, if he gave it to us too soon. Lives of pain and difficulty would seem like the heavens of the eternal world, if God resolved them for us. And so, we each find ourselves in them. And will be progressed by them. We will live each day on earth, and at death move into an eternal realm of existence. We will find a continuity of our consciousness, that our happiness and joys come with us, and that our regrets do to. If we heal our relationships with others on earth, they will be healed in heaven. We have been taught the principle that the intelligence we gain on earth, the things we learn, and the progress we make, will come with us into the eternal world. And if the journey is where we find purpose, and life, it is in the journey that we must find peace.

The challenge for the soul to finding peace, is to find it in the midst of a world in which it's efforts are sometimes in conflict with the will and intention of others, and it's values are opposed. The gospel is supposed to bring peace. What I want to look at theologically, is this relationship between peace and opposition, because while there is the positive side of opposition, the growth and progression that opposition in our lives may cause, or encourage within us in response, the negative side of opposition is evident as well. It isn't fun to have someone or something working against our values and objectives. And it can feel terrible. It can feel like the opposite of peace, create anxiety and insecurity, and cause all of the human attempt to control, and manipulate others and their environment to force the outcomes they intend.

I grew up a chess player, and when I was five years old I learned the principle of opposition by a teacher who placed two kings on a board in front of each other separated by one square. The king who's turn it was to move broke opposition with the other, and the other side could then leave him alone, or pose opposition against him again. And if he did, the king moving away would not find peace. And the reason is that he has an opponent. In the gospel, we have an understanding of there being an opponent to light. But our lives find opposition in much more practical context. If we took a post-dualistic view of our theology for a moment, and consider what would happen to the world without an enemy of souls (or adversary or devil), we would find a very similar world. The will of different groups of people on the earth is in conflict. Some of the most notable of these are conflicts are between different political and religious groups. But there are many others.

If something I want is in conflict with something you want, we might become adversaries. That would mean that I would exert the energy of my soul in one direction, and you would exert it in another. We might look something like Dr Seuss's north and south going zax. Neither one of us is evil; we just want different things.

When the things we want are thwarted by someone else, or when our definition of good is attacked or worked against by someone else, they may feel like they are our enemy. And I think this concept is interesting, because Jesus addresses the concept of having an enemy very directly in the gospels, and in a very personal context. I mean in the sense of personal enemies we have in our lives, which I think he does for the reason and wisdom that it is in these relationships that peace or conflict on earth are created. Inside or outside of sources of spiritual influence which might fit a greater dualistic or practical energetic understanding of spiritual influence, my inclination toward selfishness is my own, and I cannot blame it on anyone outside of myself. I might be influenced, it is true, but my action in the world, ultimately, is my own. Each individual soul has some degree of accountability (even if not perfect) for their actions. Were it not so, there would be no validity in this mortal test and probation. And inside of the personal sin and shortcoming of the individual, each should work to make amends (we should try even though there is a redeemer), and to improve one's own soul so that he is not disposed toward these things again.

If we are going to try and find peace, here, in our personal lives and efforts, I believe Christ understood and taught that it is about working through and with opposition in all of our practical relationships, finding peace in our day to day lives, and creating communities and societies where we find conflict less and less, and unity more and more. In healing opposition, Jesus taught us not to resist our enemies, not to counter a punch with a punch, but to lay down our guard instead. Here, instead of raising my arm against you, I will turn my face toward you so that you might have an easier time hitting me again, and perhaps harder. Instead of running away or breaking opposition, the king says, take what you want from me. Take what you will. "And they buried their weapons of war for peace."

There is one line of one movie that I get moved by every single time that I hear. And it is in the movie Gandhi, when he is talking to his Christian friend about non-violence, and he says that every time they receive a blow and do not retaliate, it will make their opponent's hatred for them decrease, and respect for them increase. In Spinoza's metaphysics, he determines that the only thing that can remove hatred is love. It's the only thing. And Jesus Christ tells us to love those who hate us, and who persecute us, and despitefully use us. Lord please make us strong enough to do this.

Jesus pointed toward a very unexpected peace. And it isn't one where we control everything we want and intend through the force of our will, or that all circumstances turn out exactly the way we intend. It is the one where I am willing to compromise a little of what I need to help you get a little more of what you need, one where the king doesn't run to the next square, but stands and says, what can I give to you, that you would be my friend instead of my enemy. How can I help you? What do you need? The Lord will turn this world, by turning the hearts of the souls of men. He is the Prince of Peace, and will come to reign on this earth in peace, in his time, and in his glory. Of these things I bear my testimony. In his name, Amen.

