

Two "Adventures in the Truth"

by Gordon Laird

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I don't remember whether it was my reading Mahatma Gandhi's autobiography or whether it was a rather literal reading of scripture, but it was during the time when I was a theology student, that I came upon a personal adventure.

I decided to experiment by taking some scripture passages literally and act upon them - just to see what might happen. The passage I chose one Jesus turning the other cheek. What would happen, I wondered, if I took that literally? What if I was literally, in the face of provocation, to turn the other cheek?

My first opportunity to test the theory happened on 16th avenue at the corner of Trimble or Tolmie. There was a car stopped and a bicycle on its side on the boulevard. A number of people had stopped to watch what certainly was shaping up to be a fight, between the driver of the car and the cyclist.

Just as they were squaring off for a fight, I stepped between them and said, "For my sake, would you please not fight?" This illogical statement produced an amazing result. Each of the protagonists in turn, began speaking to me, instead of each other.

The motorist wailed: "He turned right in front of me!"
"I know, I know," I said, "but could you please get back in your car?"

The cyclist complained: "He just about hit me, he wasn't watching where he was going and had no concern for cyclists!"

"I know, I know. Could you just get on your bicycle and ride away?"

This "Experiment in the Truth" was very successful. By intruding between the protagonists and asking a rather simple-minded question, I had so confused the communication between them that all the intensity went out of the situation. They both drove off and the incident was over. I was feeling heartened by this experience.

The next time I had an opportunity to try an "Experiment in the Truth" happened after I was ordained and was living in Nelson, B. C. It happened near the hospital in upper Nelson. There was a convertible car with its window sporting a huge concussion, as if a rock had been thrown at it or as if it had hit something or somebody. Two fellows were squaring off just by the car. The evidence pointed to the accident to the car as the source of the conflict.

I got out of my car and put myself between the two and said, "For my sake could you not fight?"

One of the protagonists looked at me with such a look that it gave a new meaning to the phrase "If looks could kill". He turned to me and said, "F... Off!" And meant it. I had no doubt about his meaning nor about his intention to follow through. If I had hung around any longer I could have been killed!

I decided to use my discretion, and dutifully "F...ed Off!"

I remembered after this second event that, in contrast to the first event, I was wearing a clerical collar. I wonder to this day whether that had any bearing on defeating my "Experiment in Truth".

I have not tried this again.