

I've been watching a bit more TV these days since I have been social distancing. The other night I watched "Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter." The story goes that when he was young, vampires killed his young son. To exact his revenge, he becomes an expert vampire killer, tutored by a shady character who claims to be the greatest retired vampire killer ever. It turns out Lincoln's tutor is in fact a "good" vampire, who helps humans kill bad vampires. He does kill humans for their blood, but he kills only criminals and murderers and rapists and the like.

This was a very strange movie, to say the least. However, it expertly portrayed an idea that seems to be part and parcel of our human psyche: that violence against evil is the only thing that "works," and is even praiseworthy. How many other movies have we seen based on this premise?

We see this idea played out in the policing tactics that killed George Floyd. This idea is the basis of Attorney General Barr's defense of sending federal agents to Portland and other cities to quiet "evil" protestors using tear gas, batons, and rubber bullets. At his hearing before congress this week, he played a montage of video clips of acts of violence during protests, even though most of the protests were peaceful. He knew that by doing this he could tap into the human belief that violence can/should be used to destroy evil, and he would get many people to support his actions.

As followers of Jesus, we believe that love rather than violence is the strongest force there is and should be our weapon of choice. Understanding is a key component of love and is a tool that could help us in our present situation, or any situation.

Martin Luther King Jr. tried to promote understanding when he said that a riot is the voice of the unheard (and I would say the voice of the not understood). The Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh speaks eloquently about understanding as an alternative to violence:

"When you understand, you cannot help but love... To develop understanding, you have to practice looking at all living beings with the eyes of compassion. When you understand, you love. And when you love, you naturally act in a way that can relieve the suffering of people."

Rarely does logical argument and presentation of facts change people's hearts and minds about the need to use violence to rid the world of evil. This type of change happens only when someone can open their heart a little wider in compassion. And about the only way they might do that is if they experience first-hand the effects of compassion in how they are treated by us.