**GUNS AND FAITH: What gun would Jesus use?**

**I am going to talk about the intersection of guns and faith at the heart of American culture from a very personal perspective. Although I am including incidents from my own life, the intent is for this to not be about me and my experiences, but about God—who She is and how She works in the world.**

**I know what it’s like to be on the wrong end of a gun. I’ve been shot at. I’ve seen others shot. The first time was in North Carolina at a meeting of CORE, The Congress of Racial Equality. The Ku Klux Klan found out about the meeting and Klan members drove by the house repeatedly shooting through the windows. More than twenty of us lay on the floor trying to dodge bullets and creep to safer rooms--it seemed to last a long time, but was probably no more than ten minutes.**

**The second time, I was in New York City taking a bus uptown when a sniper opened fire and shots came through the windows. I could see the bullet holes, but thought we had gotten away safely—until I realized a woman sitting two rows behind me was shot and bleeding. We detoured to a nearby hospital.**

**In the third gun incident, I was walking down into the subway to catch a train near NYU and Washington Square. I got to the bottom of the stairs and was just about to round the corner, when I realized a man was holding a gun and demanding money from the token seller. People on the platforms, cowered, ran away or stood frozen afraid to move in the token line. The teller pushed money through the small slot and the man shouted it was not enough money and then he shot him point blank. Not knowing whether the teller lived or died, I ran upstairs and went to the police station. An officer kindly told me to go home and forget about being Susie Good Citizen. He explained that a gang was behind the subway robberies and if I put in a witness report, it would include my name and address. I would have to leave the city and become a fugitive.**

**These incidents were harrowing enough, but there were more encounters with guns. One in which a couple of friends rescued me from drug dealers with weapons. My sister-in-law committed suicide by literally blowing her brains out. However, none of these experiences of fear and violence prompted me to own a gun. But something did.**

**I was a victim of attempted murder twice. The first time was by a college roommate who had lost her mind. That was hugely traumatic. But, the incident of significance to this talk also happened in New York City. I was a victim of violent rape and attempted murder by a knife wielding lunatic. Guns are scary, but they are not scarier than someone holding a knife to your throat intending to use it.**

**After that trauma, I did buy a gun. I had that gun for several months and then realized the gun did not give me peace of mind. I was still afraid. I did not want to live my life in fear and needed to find another way. After many years of living in a reality that prominently featured fear and violence, the question became: how could I change that and live in a different reality? Did I actually have a choice? Is the darkside optional?**

 **These events were paralleled by meetings with spiritual teachers who were brought into my life: Quakers, Yoga guru Satchidananda, Sufi master Pier Vilayat Khan, Jesuit David Steindl-Rast and others. Two opposing worlds—a dark natural world and a sublime spiritual world co-existed-- and for several years I inhabited both or alternated between them.**

**So the questions I want to ask are these: What happens when we abandon God as our protector and choose to rely on a gun instead? What does it mean for the Second Amendment to have a higher priority than the Second Commandment which states: “You shall not make idols?” Not to mention the Sixth: “you shall not kill.” For a long time, it didn’t seem like God was protecting me. Would having a gun have helped changed the violence that touched my life? Does Christianity teach us to live in fear?**

 **Many times in the Bible God is described as saving, healing, and protecting people. There are passages about beating swords into plowshares; turning the other cheek; loving our enemies. Many verses tell us not to fear because the Lord is with us. There are virtually no passages that suggest we need to do the opposite.**

**After experiencing both a world of darkness and one of light in an extremely thorough, up close and personal way, I can say we truly do co-create with God the world we live in. As we believe, so it is. Since this is true, then choosing to have a gun means we are CHOOSING the reality of fear and violence and contributing to it being present for our families, our communities, our country and the world.**

**God has given us free will. Everyone has the right to choose what they want to invite into their life. Guns, abortion, food choices, communities, generosity, compassion, love-- and especially every thought, every prayer, every dream is a choice. For example, the head of an Evangelical School has advised all of his students to carry guns to school! What kind of world is that to live in? As we think in our hearts, so we REALLY are. These thoughts are a wish and a prayer and what we will receive.**

**I put considerable effort into creating a different reality free of fear and violence—and I definitely prefer the one I live in now-- living in the beautiful Columbia Gorge, being a member of a wonderful church community, and being safe. I determined to change my reality and God intervened to bring me into this new one.**

**It is challenging to relinquish fear when you have experienced it a lot. It became clear to me that resisting violence and guns with a gun entangled me in violence and the gun culture even more deeply. It was like having repeated one night stands hoping to get to chastity. Overcoming evil with faith released me from that. One of the great ways I found of doing this was in following what Jesus called the first and second greatest commandments: Love God above all else and Love one another. And if you fall away from that, apologize to God for failing to adhere to the mission you have been given in life. Accept grace. Then ask for protection.**

**On a business trip to New York, I experimented with this. Keep in mind that I had experienced considerable fear and violence in that city. I prayed about this and asked God to release me from all of those fear filled experiences and memories and fill my heart with love and kindness, positive expectation. The resulting experience was amazing! I was staying at a small hotel on 33rd street and had meetings at the Javitz center on 34th and 11th Avenue, in the Hell’s Kitchen area and I decided to walk there and back every day to put my beliefs into practice. Everywhere I went, I saw the love God had put in my heart: Lovers kissing on street corners, people going out of their way for me, smiles and kind words. One day, it started to rain and a man came out of his store and offered me an umbrella for $1.00; meetings were fruitful beyond expectation. At the convention center, I rounded a corner and literally ran into a woman who became a client and lifelong friend. Everything went fantastically better than well in a radiant city filled with kind and loving people.**

**It was challenging to envision a different reality and then create it. This is where capturing each thought --holding each thought captive unto Christ--proved very useful. What are you thinking about? Is it about loving one another? What thought triggers fear or anxiety in you? Can you give that up and surrender it? Can you have a positive thought?**

**In preparing for this Reflection, I studied the Bible and talked to friends—some who own guns and some who don’t. I watched the video *Armor of Light* by Reverend Schenck which is available free on PBS and I encourage everyone to watch it. This video follows an Evangelical minister and the mother of a teenage shooting victim who both ask, is it possible to be both pro-gun and pro-life? It chronicles his awakening to the huge problem of gun violence. There were 372 mass shootings in the US in 2015. 13,286 people were killed that year by firearms; 26,819 people were injured and including suicides, over 32,000 died from gunshots. There are over 300 million guns here in the US. The world is full of risky things: tornadoes, hurricanes, earthquakes, serious illness, traffic accidents, traumas and tragedies. I’ve experienced them all and must say a gun is not much protection against potential harm. God is far more powerful and helpful.**

 **From this study, I confirmed that following rules won’t help. Quoting verses to follow instead of developing a loving relationship with the divine isn’t the answer. *Knowing Christ instead of knowing about Christ* IS the answer. To me, owning a gun instead of relying on God is a “wrong agreement” with life. How can you transform that reality into one of peace and joy? Alone, we can’t. Laws, persuasion, education won’t change hearts and minds. There is only One who can change the heart of man. But with divine help, success is assured. Ask for it.**

**In conclusion, I want to encourage you all to consider not just what you are inviting into your life, but what kind of world you are helping to create for everyone else. Why do we have a country that is so focused on guns and fear? It may well be without faith in God, owning a gun seems a good idea because one has moved out of the shelter of God’s protection. How can we change that? How can we shift the focus? With every thought, breath and prayer.**

**I’ve spoken before about a few of the miracles when God has intervened to save me and bless me. Here is a huge miracle accessible to all. *If everyone had faith and acted on it, this problem would go away and we would indeed all be protected in the shadow of His wings.* You have to choose it. You have to be the change you want to see in the world. We become our truth and then we walk in that truth whatever it is. Praise God for provision and protection. And while you are praising and choosing remember: Perfect Love Casts Out Fear**