

When things get intense, people don't always act their best. As Jesus was being arrested, somebody drew his sword and cut off the ear of the servant of the high priest. Not a good idea. Not what Jesus stood for. It's like the people who rioted after the death of Martin Luther King thirty years ago; not what the man stood for. Or for that matter, like the kids who opened fire on their school in Arkansas; or those in Missouri who want concealed weapons; or those who use other weapons, like abusive words--that's not what our country stands for. But when things get intense, people don't always act their best.

This ear thing, all four gospels tell this story. (It's really gruesome, isn't it?) But they all tell it a little different. In Mark, the man with the sword is a bystander; in Matthew he's a disciple. In John he has a name; it's Peter. Matthew and Mark say it was an ear; Luke and John say it was his right ear. But Luke is the only one of the four to tell us a remarkable detail about the story. After one of Jesus' followers slices the right ear off the servant of the high priest, Jesus, who seems exasperated that still, on the night before he died, right after the Last Supper, his disciples still don't know how to put his words into action, Jesus interrupts the ugliness of that night to perform an extraordinary action of charity. Luke is the only one who tells us that at this point, Jesus touched the servant and healed him. Now here he is being arrested, an army around here, his disciples misbehaving, the end of his life obviously near, and Jesus pauses to heal one last time before he dies. "Love your enemies," Jesus said. "Do good without expecting in return," Jesus said. So here he is, true to character, true to his teaching, healing all the way to the end, healing even an enemy who has come to arrest him. Jesus accepted his arrest gracefully and lovingly. He died the way he lived. He died the way he preached.

When things get intense, we don't always act our best. We show our lack of charity, our lust for violence, our desire for vengeance. It wasn't just the cut servant who needed to be healed; it was also the guy with the sword who needed healing. As we enter this holy week, let us pray that Christ will have mercy on each of us, and heal us of despair, sin, hatred, violence, abuse, falsehood, deceit, prejudice--let us pray that Christ will heal us from whatever keeps us from him.