

Within ear shot

By Bill Kilpatrick

When I teach my course on how to have a non-violent relationship one of the hardest things for many people to overcome is the desire for retaliation. The excuse that I've heard time and time again is that my partner started it, called me a name first, hit me first, and then their partner's behaviour is used as justification for their own abusive behaviour. It's at this point that I usually ask when does the violence stop then? If we base our behaviour solely on how others are acting, then what does that say about us? What morals and ethics do we uphold?

The desire for retribution, retaliation, or to even the score goes quite far back in human history. Anybody who has a sibling knows the phrase 'but they did it first.' Most people are aware of the 'eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth' quote in the Bible, but fewer are aware of Gandhi's counter quote. It was the retributive violence between Muslims and Hindus and between the British and the Indians in the '20s, and '30s that prompted Mahatma Gandhi to make his famous quote, 'An eye for an eye and soon the whole world is blind.'

Jesus also said something similar pointing out that those who live by the sword will die by the sword. So, should anyone be surprised that someone took a shot at Donald Trump?

Trump is a man that appeals to the worst characteristics of human nature, hate, division, revenge, tribalism, retribution, manipulation, elitism, sexual violence, one-sidedness, and violence in general including an insurrection. And now, when violence occurs, numerous heads of state throughout the world seem surprised that the very violence that he had been promoting came back to whisper in his ear. A National Post article cited numerous examples such as the European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen who said she was 'deeply shocked,' and the Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida who said 'we must stand firm against any form of violence that challenges democracy.'

The Egyptian president Abdel Fattah al-Sisi referred to the shooting as a 'treacherous incident' adding that he hoped the US 'election campaigns to continue in a peaceful and healthy atmosphere, free of any manifestations of terrorism, violence or hatred.' After the Second World War, Hans Fritzsche, who was in charge of German propaganda under Joseph Goebbels' Ministry of Propaganda, said the following, 'What I would like to emanate from the darkness of this tragedy is one spark of life. I mean, the realization that crime does not begin when you murder people. Crime begins with propaganda, even if such propaganda is for a good cause. The moment propaganda turns against another nation or against any human being, evil starts.'

Trump and his ilk have turned on immigrants, socialists, leftists, communists, liberals, democrats, and anyone who disagrees with him, even Republicans, and his poisonous rhetoric has not been without consequences.

An ABC article from 2020 found 54 cases where Trump was invoked in connection with acts of violence. Those acts included threats to Syrian immigrants, punching a Latino gas attendant in the face, among other crimes and the other victims often represent other minority groups that Trump has targeted in his speeches such as African-Americans, Muslims, and Gay men. According to the ABC News article what makes this so unique is that, 'The 54 cases' are captured in court documents and police statements, under the penalty of perjury or contempt. These links are not speculative - they are documented in official records. And in the majority of cases identified by ABC News, it was perpetrators themselves who invoked the president in connection with their case, not anyone else.' No where did ABC News find any similar cases where people committed violence while invoking former presidents Barack Obama or George W. Bush. In fact in 10 of those cases 'Trump and his rhetoric were cited in court to explain a defendant's violent or threatening behaviour,' says the article. This is not a coincidence.

A Reuters article pointed out that supporters of the former president called for 'riots, revolution, and violent retribution' after he was convicted on 34 felony charges earlier this year. Trump calls for violence at his rallies, supports those who advocate violence, and has instigated a violent insurrection meant to overthrow his democracy, yet his ear allegedly gets clipped and somehow that one act,

is anti-democratic? The man is anti-democratic and has said that he would gladly be a ?dictator for a day.?

So, verbally inciting political violence is okay, but actually being violent is wrong? Neither of these is okay, yet world leaders condemn one and generally turn a blind eye to the other or at the very least condemn it behind closed doors. Hitler never killed one Jewish person, but he advocated for it, condoned it, and sanctioned it and as a head of state was ultimately responsible for it. Are these not basically the same thing?

Again, we should not be surprised that violence reared its ugly head, based simply on America's history of violence. They solve most of their international issues with violence. 9-11 resulted in massive retribution and the deaths of hundreds of thousands of innocent Afghans, Iraqis, and destabilized the middle east. Vietnam, Grenada, The Bay of Pigs, Chile in the 1970s, (the original 9-11), Columbia, etc. They have the most school shootings and according to a Washington Post article they have more guns than people. Violence is part of the American culture, it's built right in, and it's been there since the beginning. America was built on the genocide of the Indigenous people and slavery.

Like everything else that has happened to Trump and all the horrible things he has done nothing is ever his fault, the violence that happens in his name is not his fault and is not a result of his anti-immigrant violent rhetoric. According to him ?I think my rhetoric brings people together.? Which it does, but for all the wrong reasons. If we are going to advance morally as a species, we need to have politicians who appeal to what Steven Pinkerton called ?The better angles of our nature,? and not to the vilest of our most basic instincts. While Canada for now still seems less prone to political violence, being within ear shot of Trump's vile rhetoric has an impact on our politics and we should be very weary of those who seek to emulate him in any way. The consequences are also within ear shot.