October 25, 2026
Paul Purdue preaching

It will likely become apparent as I preach that I've been reading James Lawson's memoir *"Nonviolent"*.

In February 1958, Rev. Lawson began to meet almost pastorally with the Little Rock Nine. These black teenagers integrated Central High School dealing with constant abuse from white parents and students. Lawson wrote:

"(W)hen a child is being threatened with hurt or harm, you cannot legitimately tell them, "Don't fight back" without also giving them alternate strategies, ideas, and support around how they can best deal with such terrifying violence and threats…. We needed to help them see the power they already possessed, and to teach them to fight back in a more effective way than the imitating ways of their tormentors. We should, I thought, be telling the students: ***Fight back with love and nonviolence.*** *Resist, because you are on the front lines of helping to change Little Rock and this country…you have to resist! But you cannot fight back in the same way your enemies are fighting."*

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus invites us to remember our power to change the world: *"You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden… (your light can) give light to all in the house. Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."* Light changes everything.

Immediately after college James Lawson served as a Methodist Missionary to India. There Lawson studied Gandhi who led the nonviolent movement that helped end British rule of India. Did you know, Gandhi read Jesus' Sermon on the Mount every morning as part of his morning devotions?

Lawson writes. "*Gandhi saw nonviolence as using power for creation, building community, and enriching life… "nonviolence" did not mean merely "no violence." It also meant being active in creating change and fostering hope, instead of being weak and merely sowing destruction. Violence, Gahni believed, was exercising power in the wrong way, for decimation, domination, and destruction. Nonviolence was exercising power for the mutual benefit, fulfillment, and prosperity of everyone."*

Jesus, Gandhi, Lawson and King believed nonviolent resistance can change the hearts of oppressors as it shines the light of humanity back on the oppressor. The hater, oppressor and evil-doer sees the image of God standing before them resisting their hate. Nonviolence is costly, but can change everything

On the cross Jesus hangs naked before all human rage, violence and injustice. How is it that people with the crosses in our sanctuaries, tattooed on our biceps, and worn around our necks so easily embrace revenge, curses, taunts and violence so easily? Do we not understand how the cross is a symbol of nonviolence resistance?

Lawson taught nonviolence resistance as a kind of math or science equation. *"You cannot overcome evil with evil. You can't imitate evil and expect to get something different. If you do that, you simply multiply the wrong. Instead, a goodness of some kind must be used to combat*

evil…. Only nonviolence, which is love and justice in action, can resolve conflict and dissipate danger in a way that is not destructive."

On the NYT podcast, The Daily, General Stanley McChrystal shared at the start of the Iran War: we think we can go in blow up the leader's home, kill their father, shake up their families and "beat them up pretty good: And then we say, 'well, that will make him more willing to negotiate it, right'? It would not have that effect on me" (March 23, 2026 "The Opinions: Everything After This Will Be Harder"

When has cursing increased our blessings? When has violence brought deeper goodwill from adversaries? When has hate sown peace?

Rev. Lawson, Diane Nash, John Lewis, Dr King and Jesus ask us: What tools do we pick up to resist evil, injustice and oppression? Do we allow evil to guide our resistance to evil? Do we let the things we abhor into our souls?

Jesus calls to use different tools, to walk by a different light: a path that is humble, able to mourn, that moves with a gentle strength, that thirsts after what is right for everyone, that practises mercy, that keeps a pure heart, that strives to make peace, that endures persecution to bring healing, that is willing to be reviled, lied about and mistreated like the prophets of old, to shine out love, no matter what everyone else is doing. Jesus calls us to resist becoming something other than the children of God.

To be a child of God, when all hell had broken loose is an amazing, almost miraculous thing. Rev Lawson shares about such a moment that happened with the Little Rock Nine.

"One of the girls, Carlotta Walls, told us about a white boy in her eight A.M. class who had "bombed" (tossed a little rock in a tissue) her again. This "bomb" whizzed by her ear, missing her, hit the wall, and dropped to the floor. Her legs became shaky as an idea came to her: She walked to the wall, stooped down to the floor, and picked up that rock and took it over to the boy's desk… She gently put the rock on his desk, in front of him.

And with her best energy, she simply looked him in the eye and smiled.

According to her report, that changed the boy so much that … The next morning when she walked into the classroom, he was standing by the door. He said, "Good morning," and smiled at her. And he was never again one of those doing the tormenting.

The fact that she had responded calmly, no matter the fear churning inside her, was extraordinary. The Little Rock Nine were surrounded by our nation's culture of violence: segregation, the governor, the school board, and the parents of white kids. But Carlotta, in the highest moment of torment, had reflected back to the world not her agony but her humanity, the inward awareness that she was a human being and was acting out of human goodness."

You and I are the light of the world. Let God's Light shine LookLook you, rekindling all that is good, and then flow out from you into the world.

Being a light is not easy. The Apostle Paul was beaten, lied about, arrested and imprisoned for drawing the circle wider and welcoming all people, Paul knew the struggle … you see it in our passage, you see the light too. Paul writes

So don't get discouraged,
Instead, reject secrecy and shameful actions.
Don't use deception
Instead we commend ourselves to God and everyone's conscience
As we publicly announce the truth,
The gods of this age have blinded many minds
But God said "that light should shine out of the darkness".
God has shone in our hearts,
and gives us the light of knowledge,
In the presence of Jesus!

But we have this treasure in clay jars
because the awesome power within us belongs to God.
We experience all kinds of trouble,
but we aren't crushed.
We are confused,
but we aren't depressed.
We are harassed, but we aren't abandoned.
We are knocked down, but we aren't knocked out
.
We always carry Jesus' death with us
so that Jesus' life can shine through us.
Although death is at work around us.
life is at work within us!
The One who raised the Lord Jesus
will also raise us up,
And will bring us all into God's presence.

So we aren't depressed,
even if our bodies are breaking down,
We know the person within us is being renewed every day.
Our problems are producing eternal glory,
that is beyond all comparison!

So we don't focus on the things that can be seen
but on the things that can't be seen.
The things that can be seen don't last,
but the things that can't be seen are eternal.

In these are perplexing times, filled with all kinds of trouble
Let us re-kindle Christ's light within us,
remembering who we are,
And shine a different way of life into this world
So God's kingdom may come
on earth as in heaven. Amen