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Notes from editor (not for publication):

HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

A resistance emboldened by love

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####BEGIN SUBHED####

Millions of people took to the streets and exercised their
right to assemble and petition the government for grievances. But
is protest alone enough?

####END SUBHED####

TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

THE YEAR 1949 was not a good year to be Black in
America.

Having just risked their lives fighting fascism abroad,
Black soldiers returned to Jim Crow laws and cross-burnings in
the middle of the night. Literacy tests kept African Americans
from voting, and occasional lynchings kept them “in their place.”

12 There was no Fair Housing Act, there was no Civil Rights
13 Act, and only a couple of Supreme Court cases prohibited Jim
14 Crow from being enforced on inter-state transportation.

15 Howard Thurman, a religion professor at Howard
16 University, looked at the situation and was reminded of the
17 predicament of Jews under Roman occupation. The Jews had two
18 options: to resist or not to resist. Non-resistance came in two
19 shades: assimilation or cultural separation.

20 Some Jews, like Matthew of Gospel fame, became tax
21 collectors and received special benefits from the occupiers. Most
22 focused on their faith and stayed out of politics. As long as the
23 Jews followed the laws of the Sanhedrin, a Jewish legislative and
24 judicial assembly, the Romans would permit Jewish observances.
25 But if the Sanhedrin could not control its people, Rome would
26 take immediate charge.

27 While nonresistance looked weak, resistance brought its
28 own set of problems, a greater likelihood of suffering being one
29 of them.

30 * * *

31 LIKE NONRESISTANCE, resistance came in two shades:
32 violent and nonviolent. Some Jews joined the Zealots, a guerrilla
33 operation that trained men how to kill Romans and betrayers
34 most effectively.

35 The Zealots were persecuted by the Romans and feared
36 by the Jewish authorities. If too many men engaged in armed
37 resistance, Rome would take down the Jews' separate realm. No
38 more rabbis, no more Jewish law, no more Jewish customs.

39 The only option left, says Thurman, was to take up the
40 playbook of Jesus, "the poor Jew from Nazareth." In order to
41 succeed, resistance would have to be nonviolent.

42 But it's one thing to say, "I'm following Jesus," and
43 another thing entirely to bring down the powers of the Empire
44 upon your mortal head.

45 Who would court that kind of suffering? Jesus.

46 * * *

47 CHRISTIAN FAITH figures largely in Thurman's accounting
48 in his book *Jesus and the Disinherited*. But so does human
49 psychology. Thurman focuses on the "hounds of hell" — fear,
50 deception, and hatred — and how those passions secretly
51 undermine nonviolent resistance by enlarging the capacities of
52 the enemy in each person's mind.

53 The more you fear something, explains Thurman, the
54 more you exaggerate their fearsomeness. The more you hate
55 something, the more you exaggerate their hatefulness.

56 The trick to getting away from the hounds of hell is to
57 turn and face your enemy with love.

58 The effect of this shift is both spiritual and practical.
59 "One of the practical results following this new orientation,"
60 writes Thurman, "is the ability to make an objective, detached
61 appraisal of other people, particularly one's antagonists."

62 Once you stop fearing them, you'll be able to see them
63 at human size. Eventually you will notice how fear in particular
64 led you astray: Your earlier perceptions were greatly exaggerated.

65 * * *

66 THURMAN CONVINCED leaders in the civil rights
67 movement to try the Jesus strategy. It worked. By most accounts,
68 the civil rights movement was the most successful social
69 movement in the history of the United States. Its successes can be
70 measured in Supreme Court wins and legislative victories.

71 What is often missed is the spiritual success of the civil
72 rights movement, the inner work that brought its own rewards.
73 When Americans watched a group of protestors under attack by a
74 merciless state, they not only wanted to join in the protest, they
75 wanted to experience that sort of freedom. *Oh, to walk the Earth*
76 *unbridled by fear and hate, to be as loving as Jesus.*

77 In 2025, fewer people may be persuaded by references
78 to Jesus. Still, most acknowledge that a politics of fear, deception,
79 and hate is not working. So how to build a politics of love?

80 The No Kings March showed that the resistance takes
81 nonviolence seriously. Millions of people took to the streets and

82 exercised their right to assemble and petition the government for
83 grievances.

84 But is protest alone enough? In Brattleboro, Django
85 Grace urged the protestors to abandon emotions that enhanced
86 our differences.

87 "They want us to be divided," he said.

88 While not going so far as advocating a politics of love,
89 Grace was reflecting back the destructiveness of a politics of fear
90 and hate.

91 * * *

92 IN 1949, THURMAN could use Christian references to
93 build a case for a resistance of love: "Love your enemy that you
94 may be children of your father who is in heaven."

95 A politics of love in the 21st century might say, "Love
96 your enemy as part of a new orientation, one that affords you an
97 objective and detached way of seeing each other. Abandon fear
98 because it distorts your capacity to see the creative possibilities
99 all around you. Give up on hate because it doesn't help your
100 indigestion. And stop being deceptive with your words because
101 you'll lose any grasp of the truth."

102 And here's the wonderful thing about a politics of love. If
103 you look into any religious tradition you will find reasons not to
104 be afraid. Sometimes its framed in terms of detachment and
105 sometimes in terms of God's children and sometimes in the
106 language of a higher power. Religious and secular guideposts
107 abound.

108 All it takes is a few brave souls to put it into practice, and
109 another courageous movement will be born. We may not all have
110 faith in Jesus, but perhaps we can have faith in ourselves through
111 a politics of love.

####END TEXT####

BIO/COATTAIL:

####BEGIN BIO/COATTAIL####

112 **MEG MOTT** is professor emerita of Marlboro College
113 and Emerson College and describes herself as a “Constitution
114 Wrangler.” She was a moderator of a panel at the recent
115 Brattleboro Indivisible exhibition “What Does Democracy Look
116 Like?”

####END BIO/COATTAIL####

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