

Friends,

Thank you for the opportunity to be with you here today and to speak about Jesus and Gandhi. It may seem sacrilege to some Christians to put Jesus and Gandhi on the same pedestal, but neither Jesus nor Gandhi wanted to be placed on a pedestal in the first place, and it is only when we see the humanity first and then the divinity in both of them that we shall grasp what they tried to teach us.

Gandhi was attracted to the teachings of Jesus as he found it in the Sermon on the Mount. He was happy to discover a 'unity' between the Sermon on the Mount and the teachings of Krishna in the Hindu Scripture, the Bhagavad Gita.

As a young child, Gandhi was greatly influenced by his parents, especially his mother, Putlibai. She inculcated in him the spiritual values found in the Bhagavad Gita teachings of Krishna to Arjuna on the battle field: the virtue of self-discipline, renunciation, unconditional love, self suffering and acknowledging divinity in all human beings.

In the Sermon on the Mount, which he read carefully while he was in England, he found an echo of what he had learnt as a child, especially the idea of renunciation of passions and possessions and in particular, Jesus' call to "love your enemy" and to "turn the other cheek when someone smites you on your right cheek".

Gandhi said "Jesus occupies in my heart the place of one of the greatest teachers who had a considerable influence on my life. I shall say to the Hindus that your life will be incomplete unless you reverentially study the teachings of Jesus".

However, Gandhi remained a devout Hindu all his life and died with the name of Rama on his lips when he was shot and killed by a Hindu fanatic. When asked by the missionary from America, Stanley Jones, why he refused to become a Christian, Gandhi replied "I do not reject Christ. I love Christ. It is just that so many of you Christians are so unlike Christ".

In South Africa, he decided to attend a church service but he came across a racial barrier. His entry into the church was barred by a white man who asked him, "Where do you think you're going, Kaffir?" Gandhi calmly replied "I would like to attend worship here". The white Christian immediately retorted angrily "There is no room for Kaffirs in this church. Get out or I'll have you thrown out". This incident and many such others forced Gandhi to never again consider becoming a Christian, though he never rejected Christ. Stanley Jones wrote of Gandhi "Never in human history has so much light been shed on the cross as had been shed through this man, who was not even a Christian".

It distressed Gandhi when he heard Christians put aside the Sermon on the Mount as impractical or dreamy idealism and irrelevant to daily life. In general, Christians believed it was meant only for the twelve disciples. However, Gandhi believed that the Sermon on the Mount was for each and every person in their daily lives. He firmly believed that we Christians were denying Christ every day in our lives.

Mahatma Gandhi was a Hindu, but I believe that he was more Christian than most Christians. Gandhi led a freedom movement against the British Empire in India, and demonstrated to the Englishmen

their own religion in such a powerful way that the last Viceroy of India, Lord Mountbatten said that "Gandhi would be remembered in history on par with Christ".

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus was reinterpreting the moral foundation of Judaism- the Ten Commandments. He was encouraging His followers to seek the way of righteousness. He spoke of renunciation of passions and possessions when He spoke of the need to overcome and transcend anger, lust and greed. Jesus says in the Sermon, "You have heard it said "You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy"; but I say to you, "Love your enemy and do good to those who hate you".

Gandhi resisted the evil of the British Empire in India but he did not accept violence as a method to gain freedom for India. He demonstrated the 'way of the cross' by leading non-violent protests to convince the British that their actions and laws in India were totally unacceptable and evil in nature.

Jesus also says, "You have heard it said (Matt. 5:27-28), "You shall not commit adultery", but I say to you that whosoever looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery". And later in Matthew 19:12, he says, "For there are eunuchs who were born thus from their mother's womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake".

At a very early age in his life, Gandhi endeavoured to become "God's eunuch" by renouncing the sexual appetite, even in his marital life.

Jesus also says in the Sermon that one should not worry about one's needs- what one will eat or drink. "Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns. Yet your heavenly Father feeds them. And in Matthew 19:24 he says "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God".

Very early in his life, as a young man in South Africa, Gandhi renounced all material possessions. He lived a life of voluntary poverty and except for a handful of inexpensive items that he required for his spiritual strength including a copy of the Bhagavad Gita, the Sermon on the Mount and a book entitled "Life and teachings of Jesus Christ", he owned little else.

Martin Luther King, Jr. remarked, "Gandhi was probably the first person in history to lift the love ethic of Jesus to a powerful social force on a large scale". 'Love' for Gandhi was a potent instrument for social transformation.

Lord Irwin asked Gandhi what would solve the problems between the British and the Indians. Gandhi replied that "When your country and mine accept the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, we shall solve the problem not only of our countries, but those of the world".

It is ironic but possibly true that the greatest Christian of the modern world was not a man who was a devout Hindu and not a Christian by tradition.

I trust that this shows how much Gandhi valued the life and teachings of Jesus and I hope it is clear how much we, as Christians, owe to Gandhi.

Thank you.