By Don Timmerman

We are involved with a group of Churches who formed a partnership which they call Just One More. One of its goals is to salvage food that would otherwise be thrown out by food outlets, restaurants, and food stores; and give it to those in need. We go three days a week to pick up the salvaged food and bring it to Casa Maria to feed our guests and others who come from around the inner city. One day while we were unloading the food from the truck at Casa Maria, a disgruntled man pushed people away and slugged one of our workers in the face. The worker fell to the ground in pain. The amazing thing is that the worker did not retaliate, and the attacker was given food to take home. Why did this man who was attacked and now in pain not retaliate? Because he is a Christian!

Christians do not retaliate. They always forgive. They do not see revenge. They seek only to change the behavior of the attacker by showing love to him. This is what Christ meant when he said “Love others as I have loved you.” As is written in the first scripture reading today, “God shows no partiality.” As Christians we cannot feed or care for only those who love us. We are to feed and care for those who do not love us as well. We are to love both friend and enemy. It is easy to love those who love us and do good to us. Most people do this. But a Christian, a follower of Christ, also loves and does good to those who do him or her harm and do all manner of bad things to him/her. A Christian does good to the enemy, the one who wants to harm him or her.

In the Gospel reading Christ says, “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” This sentence is often used by the military to justify killing the enemy in order to protect one’s family, community or nation. But Christ did not mean to justify killing another to protect people. Christ would never approve killing someone in order to save another. He scolded Peter who tried to protect Jesus by cutting off the ear of the soldier who came to arrest Jesus. When Christ was tormented he did not seek revenge. He prayed for his persecutors. He did this to show us how to live and behave. Everyone is to be loved, even those who do wrong to us. We are all one body. Christ laid down his life to show us how to live. What we do to another we do to the whole world. What we do to others we do also to Christ. Christ tells us that our joy and protection lies not in arming ourselves with violent weapons to harm or destroy our enemies but in loving everyone, no matter what race, color, nationality or ethnic origin he or she comes from. Yes, and even those who do harm to us.

As we see in the Gospel, Christ gave us this command to love all not because he wants us to be miserable or unprotected, but rather because he wants us to be happy, to be saved. He
tells his disciples, “I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy might be complete.” The secret to happiness (salvation) is to love all, not just our friends and family, but also those who seek to harm us. We are to rise with Christ above revenge, hatred, racism, bigotry, nationalism and other harmful things. We are to rise with Christ to love all, to bear good fruit. Let us all rise in love.

Don Timmerman is a long-time peace and justice activist and a member of the Casa Maria Catholic Worker community in Milwaukee, WI.