

Rev. Anne J. Scalfaro
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10:30 a.m. MT Worship
Second Sunday after Epiphany

Calvary Baptist Church
Denver, Colorado

“More Self-Control: Less Self, Less Control”

First Sermon in *Cultivating the Fruit of Self-Control*
Part of *Abide & Grow: Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit*

NOTE: A sermon is a spoken word event. This manuscript served as a guide but is not exact to what was preached in the moment.

Leviticus 19:9-10; Deuteronomy 24:19-22; Ruth 2

New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

Some of the Fruit of the Spirit are more palatable than others. Love, joy, peace, kindness, goodness...just their names ring sweetly in our ears. They conjure up warm fuzzies, even though the concepts themselves are theologically deep and hard to live out in real life. Self-control is not one of those ‘warm, fuzzy’ Fruit. It less of a succulent, ripe, peach and more like a coconut that falls from the tree and bonks you on the head. Something you can’t quite crack open; even though you know the juice inside is full of really good electrolytes and nourishing qualities. It’s a rare fruit, self-control. And it certainly feels illusive right now because of the blatant and rampant lack of self-control that we see in our obsession as a nation with the three evils as Dr. King called them: racism, materialism (capitalism), and militarism.¹

Just as the Black-eyed Peas made famous the question, “Where is the love?” in their 2003 chart-topping song by that same name, I find myself wondering “Where is the self-control?” And I’m not talking about a January “New year, New you” kind of self-control with “shoulds and shaming” related to diet culture or denying of self for the sake of personal betterment or holding one’s tongue for the sake of ‘good manners.’ I’m talking about a kind of self-control that says: We will not be manipulated by ads and algorithms. We will not be ripped off by corporate monopolies. We will not seek to dominate or acquire other peoples, lands, and countries. We will not allow violence against neighbors and citizens in our own country. We will not allow ourselves to respond to hate with hate. We will not let

¹ <https://www.blackagendareport.com/speech-three-evils-society-martin-luther-king-jr-1967>, accessed on January 18, 2026.

our fear keep us from living out our faith.

Where is the self-control, indeed? It's a deeply reflective question and an imperative one in these times. It is moral question, a holy question.

This is why—as we begin our study of the Fruit of the Spirit of Self-Control—we're beginning by looking at how self-control can be a transformational and prophetic tool for bringing about the kin-dom of God here on earth.

The Greek word for self-control that Paul uses in Galatians 5:23 in his list of the Fruit of the Spirit is ἐγκράτεια enkráteia, which means temperance. Temperance, if you need a refresher, means “the quality of moderation or self-restraint.” Moderation and restraint are not words of self denial, but of self-regulation. Can we regulate ourselves when there is too much of or too little of something in our life? When we're too hot, our bodies regulate by sweating and if we're too cold, by shivering. Regulation is about the health of the whole body and what is true

for our physical bodies is also true for our corporate or communal bodies.

When you dig deeper you see that *enkrateia* derives from *en* (in/within) and *kratos* (power/strength) in the Greek, signifying the Holy Spirit's enabling strength *from within* to temper our passions or desires, which is different than mere human restraint or even restraints or rules imposed from the outside. It is also different than the other Greek word for self-control which is *sôphrosunê* (σωφροσύνη); that means self-control in terms of “soundness of mind,” but *enkrateia* specifically emphasizes the power or mastery over one's own impulses,² or, of one's *actions*. We cultivate spiritual strength within ourselves (aka, self-control) for the purpose of how we *act* toward others around us.

I'd like to propose today that while self-control may begin with the self, its end is the community. And self-control is not about gaining more control, but about releasing our grip on control, letting go of our need to control others or even ourselves.

² <https://philosofun.ca/2024/08/04/enkrateia-the-key-to-spiritual-growth-and-christian-virtue/>, accessed on January 18, 2026.

It's been a grounding spiritual balm for me this week to immerse myself in this hypothesis: **self-control is the key to communal liberation.** Maybe of all the Fruit of the Spirit, self-control is the one that gets us the closest to the kin-dom of God on earth as it is in heaven. Because it serves as a 'check and balance' on our egos and as an invitation to find freedom by letting go of trying to control our lives or other people's lives. Or even just being so focused on 'self,' which is a natural human tendency.

So hear me out on this hypothesis, and then let me know what you think. I'm growing along with you in this series.³

Let's begin with a history lesson, then move to the biblical narrative, then see where this lands us today.

History first. We remember the life and legacy of the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. this

³ I realize religious harm is real and there are people here who struggle to even hear the term self-control. Listen gently today. Give yourself time and space to feel what you feel and allow in whatever you can right now. The Fruit of the Spirit are not about achieving a goal that we check off a list; they are about growing in these practices for the rest of our lives. Wherever you are today is where you are meant to be. And if you've been shamed into an understanding of self-control that is about denying

weekend. One of our Baptist heroes. And we remember the Civil Rights movement that was seeded by his work, his faith, his preaching, his activism. We also remember he was harassed and hated and assassinated for his prophetic leadership, his moral stand, his faith-filled convictions. King knew that being concerned with self-preservation does not lead to communal liberation. King is known for his nonviolent resistance, learned from Ghandi, which is rooted in a deep spiritual practice of self-control. It's laced through out all 6 principles; here are just a few examples.

For example, Principle 3 says *Attack Forces Of Evil Not Persons Doing Evil.*⁴ In other words, don't react to personality but to policies. LOTS of self-control there when someone is sneering in your face.

Principle 4 says, *Accept Suffering Without Retaliation For The Sake Of The Cause To Achieve A Goal.*⁵ In other words, as you suffer, your

yourself certain things in order "to be good enough for God"—I hope today can provide a different framework. For we grow the Fruit of Self-Control not to appease a God who wants to punish us for individual sins, but to co-create a world where everyone is free.

⁴ <https://www.gatheringforjustice.org/six-principles-of-kingnian-nonviolence>, accessed on January 18, 2026.

⁵ <https://www.gatheringforjustice.org/six-principles-of-kingnian-nonviolence>, accessed on January 18, 2026.

NON-reaction reveals the inhumane actions of your oppressor; let them speak for themselves. Restraine *your* reactions so others can see clearly *their* actions. Again, hard. Self-control.

And Principle 5 says: *Avoid Internal Violence Of The Spirit As Well As External Physical Violence.*⁶ In other words, “shore up your soul.” Root yourselves in deep spiritual practices and with spiritual fortitude so you don’t begin to believe what they say about you. Have a close relationship with your Creator; get your worth and identity from God, not others.

The training that Civil Rights Activists went through centered on the whole of the human person: spiritually, physically, emotionally, mentally. Because it took incredible personal restraint to protest non-violently in the face of blatant and state sanctioned violence that was racist and militaristic and all about controlling black people: where they could sit, what fountain they could drink out of, where they could live, as well as what they could not do—get loans, get jobs, get educations,

vote, or even swim in community pools. White-supremacy is ultimately and always about power and control and the fear of losing it. It is an evil that must be rooted out again and again and again.

The witness and courage and self-control of Civil Rights activists is inspiring.

A few years ago I traveled with a group of Calvary members across the South for a Civil Rights Tour. One of the most memorable experiences was a visceral one. We were at the National Center for Civil and Human Rights in Atlanta. One of their exhibits—*Rolls Down Like Water*—immerses visitors in the powerful—and often painful—journey of the American Civil Rights Movement. Part of that exhibit is called the Lunch Counter Experience, which has the description: “Immerse yourself in the sights, sounds, and moral courage of nonviolent protest. Feel what it means to take a stand by sitting down.”⁷

You sit down on a stool at the counter, put on headphones, put your hands on top of the counter and close your eyes. All the

⁶ <https://www.gatheringforjustice.org/six-principles-of-kingian-nonviolence>, accessed on January 18, 2026.

⁷ <https://www.civilandhumanrights.org/rolls-down-like-water/>

sudden the voices start coming at you from all sides. Violent sneers, horrific name calling. You can hear screams and hear beating in the background. The violence is happening around you and at you. It feels like your taunters are whispering and shouting in your ear at the same time, breathing down your neck. I remember feeling so claustrophobic even though nothing is physically around you. You hear the sounds of people being beat beside you, crying out. The sounds of people laughing and mocking. Then the counters start to shake. It keeps going. On and on and on. At some point you break and open your eyes. You realize you have been holding your breath. I remember my heart racing. The person beside me had sweat beading on their forehead. I felt nauseous the rest of the day.

And that was a *simulation*.

You cannot sit at that counter and not grasp the sheer fortitude and self-control that non-violent protesting requires.

Describing the sit-in in May 1963 at the Woolworth's lunch counter in Jackson, Mississippi, John Salter—who worked closely with Mississippi NAACP leader Medgar Evers

said of his experience that day: “This was the most violently attacked sit-in during the 1960s. A huge mob gathered, with open police support while the three of us sat there for three hours. I was attacked with fists, brass knuckles and the broken portions of glass sugar containers, and was burned with cigarettes. FBI agents were observing inside but took no action.”

Joan Trumpauer Mulholland, another white student participating in the sit in said, “All hell was breaking loose...I sat down and then Annie (Anne Moody) and I got drug off our stools and drug up to the front of the store. The main weapons were whatever was sitting on the counter. Everything from vinegar to pepper to sugar, sometimes a fist. At the end of the day it was about humiliating people...to bring people to their knees psychologically...Some people had drinks dumped on them, smeared with sugar, mustard, and ketchup...The police stood by and watched all this happen. Memphis Norman was thrown to the floor, kicked in the head, beaten, unconscious. Blood was coming out of his mouth. And at that point Medgar Evans said, “should we call this off?” But

we were committed to sitting there. When it got to looking like really we may not make it out of there I had sort of an out of body experience. Your real self leaves parts and it's surreal, but it's survival [and at some point you 'let go.' in order to not let them get you, you let go.]⁸ At 2pm, nearly three hours after it began, the store closed and the crowds began to disperse. The pictures were shown around the world. And suddenly we were visible. This is not to take away from Dr. King, but to reduce the Civil Rights Movement to people like Rosa Parks and Dr. King makes it look like every day people can't do anything, but we can.⁹

Joan Trumpauer Mulholland, a white woman, exercised self-control, just as countless other white and black people did across our country in the 60's as they endured the violence of peers and police. And they exercised this self-control not to benefit themselves, but to change the course of history for a nation. While many in our country, including our top leadership, were trying to hold onto and control power based on race, these activists were

steeling themselves internally and releasing control on what might happen to them for the sake of the greater good of freedom for all. My, my.

We seek to cultivate more self-control for the sake of lessening the focus on self, and toward the end of loosening our grip on control.

Here's the irony: when people are focused on preserving self or exercising control at all costs, what is their behavior like? Not controlled at all, right? They are unruly and rude, not self-controlled or disciplined; often they are lost in the urgency of violence and harm; losing all sense of dignity of the other person and themselves.

From U.S. history, we turn now to our **biblical narrative** and our texts for today. And our narrative gives us an image that expands our imaginations and capacity for justice.

Leviticus and Deuteronomy are full of the Laws of Torah, rules that shape and govern life in community for the people of Israel, God's covenant people. They are not laws given from a

⁸ From the video on this page:
<https://www.zinnedproject.org/news/tdih/jackson-woolworth-sit-in/>, accessed on January 18, 2026.

⁹ From the video on this page:
<https://www.zinnedproject.org/news/tdih/jackson-woolworth-sit-in/>, accessed on January 18, 2026.

government, they are laws these people recorded as being given by God. At their heart they are about community, and the *Shema*, as recorded in Deuteronomy 6:4-9 emphasizes this: “*Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. [Love your neighbor as you love yourself.] Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.*”

In other words, do not just learn these in your own mind; live them through your lives. So we read today’s texts through this lens that is both individual responsibility and generational accountability—what are we teaching and passing down to our children?

And this is true for our case study today...on how we treat

the “resident foreigner” in our midst.

As you might imagine, ancient methods of harvesting were not as efficient as today, and what is odd is that Leviticus 19:9-10 instructs Israelites to make them even *less so*.¹⁰ Imagine that: efficiency and profits not being the goal!

First, the harvesters are instructed leave the margins, or edges, of their grain fields unharvested altogether. They are told not to even touch or harvest part of their crop. Leave it alone. That’s certainly not lucrative, financially speaking.

Second, for the part they *did* harvest, they were *not to pick up* whatever produce fell to the ground. This is what it means when it says, “don’t gather the gleanings.” This would apply when a harvester grasped a bundle of stalks and cut them with the sickle and a few fell to the ground, as well as when grapes fell from a cluster just cut from the vine. This seems wasteful if you don’t know the greater end.

¹⁰ TOW Project, “Gleaning (Leviticus 19:9-10),” *The Theology of Work*, accessed on January 18, 2026 at <https://www.theologyofwork.org/old-testament/leviticus-19-9-10/>.

Third, they were to harvest their vineyards *just once*, “not stripping it bare,” presumably taking only the ripe grapes so as to leave the *later ripening ones* for the poor and the alien (or immigrants, resident foreigners) among them. These two categories of people—the poor and the immigrant—were unified by their lack of owning land and thus were dependent on their own manual labor for food.¹¹ Their work ethic as well as their need is highlighted here. Interesting, isn’t it?

And this is really important, something you may not know if you do not know the history of this day: “Laws benefiting the poor were actually common in the ancient Near East, but *only the regulations of Israel extended this treatment to the resident foreigner*. This was yet another way that God’s people were to be distinct from the surrounding nations.”¹² Their ethic of community care was broader than borders and boundaries...of all kinds.

So not only were the Israelites to extend this treatment to their own citizens in need, they were to allow others who were not

citizens, but who were living in their land—to be able to harvest their land and glean food for themselves. To be able to live and work, not just near them or in the town over, but on their very fields, alongside their very workers. It is never said that foreigners are not supposed to be here; it is accepted that they will be there; land is not about self-preservation or ownership; it is assumed that there will be other people from other places all around, and all the land is a provision by God and thus needs to be accessible to the people of God, which is *everyone*. Of course, other texts specify the widow and the orphan as members of this category as well, as we read in Deuteronomy.¹³

Allowing the poor, the widow, the orphan, and the immigrant to be on your land, in your cities, sharing in your work, sharing in the harvest—this is expected and instructed. It is not an anomaly; it is real and regular life. Even as the Israelites understand themselves as a special, covenant people with God, they are instructed, from the beginning, that *all* people

¹¹ TOW, *ibid.*

¹² TOW, *ibid.*

¹³ Other biblical references to gleaning include Exod. 22:21-27; Deut. 24:19-21; Judg. 8:2; Ruth 2:17-23; Job

24:6; Isa. 17:5-6, 24:13; Jer. 6:9, 49:9; Obad. 1:5; Mic. 7:1.

deserving of dignity in God's eyes.

I just want to pause here. And invite us to really soak in what this biblical teaching is telling us. Immigrants are expected in our midst. They are invited to work with us, alongside us. We are to share what we have with them; enable them to work. Celebrate their presence, not condemn it. This is not a bad thing, but a good thing. We don't ask how they came into the country or if they are 'supposed to be here.' They are here, and that's what we concern ourselves with. They are in proximity to us and so we share God's provision with them. Foreigners are not seen as people "taking people's jobs" or resources, they are seen as one's who are deserving of purposeful work and labor to feed themselves and their families. There is no enforcement or removal of immigrants; there is welcome and approval.

Self-control, through these laws, is taking just what one needs and not more, yes. And it's a release of control over what you 'own' or how you 'harvest' or 'operate.' It even gives agency and control to strangers! These laws are not about self, they are about community, even as the

individual selves are the ones that practice them and live them out. These instructions in Leviticus and Deuteronomy are actions related to self-control. Don't take more than you need. Leave some land, some work, some food for others. And not just the leftovers, but the good stuff (the stuff still ripening). And remember, when you start to get a bit antsy about this, when you start to think in a scarcity mindset rather than an abundance one, *remember that you were slaves in Egypt once*. Remember that you were dependent on others once. Remember you have been a foreigner and under someone else's control once. Remember. Your story is their story is our story is their story is your story. We all share a variation of the same story, the same common humanity.

What I love about the Ruth text is that we actually get to see, in narrative fashion, what this kind of law and ethic around gleaning looks like played out in real life. This story further engages our imaginations around a whole different paradigm of living with those from other countries, of those who are poor, or disenfranchised.

Here, we have the good news of Ruth, and we get to see how this gleaning instruction plays out, and how it blesses Ruth, and her mother-in-law Naomi, and actually everyone involved in the story—including Boaz and his workers.

We see the self-control of Ruth and Naomi, as they do not despair in their situation of being foreigners, but rather Ruth takes agency to go and ask a landowner if she can glean behind his workers. In other words, she knows she has rights, and her own human agency and dignity, and she is intent on speaking up for herself so she can feed herself and her mother-in-law. And Naomi blesses Ruth's bold witnesses. There is no self-pity in this text; there is self-agency, and self-control—even as we see Ruth's humility and Boaz's compassion.

Speaking of Boaz; we're told he's a rich and important man, probably used to being 'in control.' And even before Ruth enters the story from his perspective, we see Boaz blessing his workers, and they bless him in return. This tells us a lot about Boaz's character from the start. He discovers that Ruth has been gleaning all morning, working hard, without

any rest. Note: Boaz is informed she's from Moab, she is a foreigner, and he allows her to remain. He goes up to Ruth with kindness, not with violence or interrogation, and he ensures her protection by advising her to stay in his field, with his workers. Boaz shows self-control by following this instruction and law (clearly some people in that time were not), and he allows Ruth to have some of what he has. And, also, those who work for Boaz show self-control by not bothering her, but letting her glean as she wills and wishes. Boaz even goes a step farther, showing compassion saying that Ruth can drink their water too (and there's not even a law about that)! This text is one of self-control in terms of not letting the fear of scarcity creep in or urges of wanting to "control what one has" or "what one owns," and it's also just a text about goodness, generosity, and kindness...human decency and communal thriving.

Boaz actually explains to Ruth that he sees her for her qualities of common humanity and compassion—he sees her caring for her mother-in-law. Boaz does not care what country she is from; he is touched that she cares for her late husband's

mother and his family. He is touched by Ruth's selflessness. He sees a beautiful family-first ethic that prizes caring for those in your circle and he knows that the circle goes beyond blood relatives, and even beyond country ties...it is a community based on faithfulness to God and one another.

Boaz goes a step farther, asking Ruth to join them for a meal. She eats, all that she wants, and then leaves what is left over. Again, another measure of personal self-control for someone who is hungry.

And then Boaz instructs his workers to exercise self-control even if they see Ruth gleaning from the wrong stacks (the stuff they've already picked). He tells them not to worry about whether she is gleaning correctly, but just allow her to get what she needs, and help her. And he ensures their self-control of attitude and mouth, telling them to treat her well and not to speak harshly to her, and presumably, to not sexually harass her as he knows might very well happen; she is vulnerable and so are they. He reminds all of self-agency and self-control. And it works!

Ruth has so much that she gleans, that she is able to take it to Naomi. Naomi celebrates that Ruth is able to work; tells her to keep working with the women in the field; keep gleaning, and Ruth does.

There is so much self-lessness in this text, so much celebration of common good, so much shared life together, and shared life of complete strangers! So much abundance, and so little scarcity. It's almost hard to read this text because of the grief of what's happening in our country today.

And here's the cool truth in this text. The truth that points to self-control as a tool for communal liberation. As one commentator said, "We might classify gleaning as an expression of compassion or charity, but according to Leviticus, allowing others to glean on your property is the fruit of holiness. You do it because God says, '*I am the Lord your God*' (Lev. 19:10). This highlights the distinction between charity and gleaning, which is about justice. In charity, people voluntarily give to others who are in need. This is a good and noble thing to do, but it is not what Leviticus is talking about. Gleaning is a

process in which landowners have an obligation to provide poor and marginalized people and people not from their country *access to land and to the means of production so they can work it themselves.*”¹⁴

Unlike charity, this does not depend on the generosity of landowners. In this sense, it was much more like a tax—or a communal way of life protected by the group commitments—than a charitable contribution of a few. Also, unlike charity, it was not given to the poor as a transfer payment. Through gleaning, the poor and the immigrant, the widow and the orphan, they earned their living the same way as the landowners did, by working the fields with their own labors.

“It was simply a command—[a protected community standard]— that *everyone* has a right to access the means of provision created by God”¹⁵ and use their gifts and skills and labor and time to access it. Everyone has the right to feel the dignity of work, of self-worth, of humanity. But it begins with the self-control of those who ‘own’ land, who are in a position of privilege. They must exercise restraint and self-

control in order to create the opportunity for freedom and liberation and thriving and living for all. The more you ‘own,’ the more privilege you have, the more self-control you need. But that self-control is a beautiful thing. It’s about releasing unhealthy control, releasing unchecked power; and sharing in mutual respect and work and common humanity.

This text is not about land-owning or what is “mine” and what is “yours”—it’s about not taking more than what I need of God’s creation and also realizing that it’s not just my job to share what is in my possession with others, but there is an even deeper truth here—to understand that none of this is mine to begin with, and that all are to be able to have the same experience I do harvesting; this is about creating equity and opportunity.

What a beautiful, mind-bending and heart-expanding example of the kin-dom of God, right? A prophetic vision of what the world could be like if we did not try to hoard more than we need or take more than we need or even control access to what we believe is ‘ours.’ What a

¹⁴ TOW, *ibid.*

¹⁵ TOW, *ibid.*

beautiful vision of not only how we are to SEE our immigrant neighbors, but how we are to TREAT them and honor them and allow them to live among us and with us and beside us.

And that brings us to today. Hold this biblical narrative vision in your mind and then hold the visions of what you see ICE doing in Minneapolis and in Denver and in communities across our country. Let those images speak to you. What are the differences? What are the similarities? Where do you see self-control in service of the common good? Or in service of communal liberation?

In the context of what we are seeing on the streets of our country right now—as families are torn apart and people are taken from their jobs, robbed of the ability to work and have dignity in their provision for themselves—it seems that agencies like ICE are guided much more by an ethic of control and greed and ‘what’s mine is not yours’ than an ethic of compassion and justice and equity. There is no self-control when someone is snatching another person out of a car, or beating them, or hurling insults, or using tear gas. And this lack of self-control is terrifying when

it’s protected by and endorsed by the federal government. That’s what makes it different than a regular citizen doing these things.

The Bible is pushing us on our understanding of communal responsibility and citizenship, as it always does. These texts are inviting us to remember that God’s kin-dom does not have boundaries or borders; all are included and welcomed. A line drawn on a map represents a land negotiation from years ago, that most definitely had to do with power and control, rather than sharing and stewardship.

When we pray, “thy kin-dom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” what does that actually mean? In whatever your vision of heaven is...does it have borders? Does it have people divided into categories? Lawful, unlawful? Illegal alien or citizen? Black or white? If our images of heaven are not about power and control, but about community and shared life – then is that *not* the image, the reality of what we are trying to be creating here on earth?

God calls us to see all people as people. To loosen our control and concern with where we are from or what papers we have.

Or what we own or don't own. And I get it. Immigration policies and our immigration situation is complicated and complex. But what is not complicated is the gospel: Love God. Love neighbor as you love yourself...which means showing some self-control. Love the person in front of you and while you are loving them and treating them with dignity, then figure out the complexities of the system. Something being 'complex' is not an excuse for terror or violence or blanket policies of sweeping people up.

The daring and bold truth of the Gospel is that the less we worry about having control over what we think is 'ours' or 'theirs,' the more we care about the communal liberation and wellbeing of all – the collective and common good of the whole.

I find the laws in Deuteronomy and Leviticus and the story of Ruth 2 to be a balm for my soul in these days of terrorizing foreigners and hurting our immigrants and neighbors. Scripture is so clear on how we are to treat foreigners, neighbors, fellow beloved children of God. Scripture is SO clear. There is no moral ambiguity. The Fruit of the Spirit are to be present. And

self-control is the key to unlocking all the other Fruit in our lives. Self-control is what allows the Spirit of God within us to have the loudest voice and strongest say. Self-control is about giving the most control to the power of our better angels, and not our worst fears. Self-control is about dying to self, and loosening our grip on trying to control our lives or our fate.

What does self-control look like in an age of ICE terror? Self-control might look like focusing a little less on yourself or your safety, but realizing that showing up for the community and for others is what is needed. It might mean letting control of how we understand the law or these agencies that we've been taught to respect at all costs, and returning again to the pages of scripture and the life of Jesus – which show us – time and time and time again – that it is in giving up control, that we are truly free. "*Father, not my will, but THY will be done,*" Jesus said in the garden. "*Father, into your hands I surrender my spirit.,*" Jesus says on the cross.

The story of our faith and of our savior is one of sacrificing self for the good of the whole, and the beautiful thing is, "the whole" includes us...so it really

isn't a sacrifice at all. There is no self, without community. There is not freedom without letting go of our grip on power and control.

The three evils that Dr. King spoke so poignantly about in his keynote address in Chicago in 1967 entitled, *The Three Evils of Society*:—racism, militarism and materialism—are all rampant right now. We see them epitomized in ICE. In this speech, decades earlier, King was speaking about the Vietnam War, but we might hear these words in the context of all the wars around us today and across the globe:

“So let us stand in this convention knowing that on some positions; cowardice asks the questions, is it safe; expediency asks the question, is it politic; vanity asks the question, is it popular, but conscious asks the question, is it right. And on some positions, it is necessary for the moral individual to take a stand that is neither safe, nor politic nor popular; but he must do it because it is right. And we say to our nation tonight, we say to our Government, we even say to

our FBI, we will not be harassed, we will not make a butchery of our conscience, we will not be intimidated and we will be heard.”¹⁶

Self-control does not mean being meek or letting the forces of power and evil walk all over us. Self-control is about harnessing one's inner spiritual strength, rooted in the belovedness of all people, and restraining our inclinations towards control or greed or acquisition, even restraining our inclinations towards “safety at all costs” at the cost of civility or civil rights for all people.

The Fruit of Self-control, as seen in protest movements and in this biblical understanding of the kin-dom of God is transformational and prophetic.

The second of King's Nonviolent Principle's is my favorite: *“The Beloved Community Is The Framework For The Future*: The nonviolent concept is an overall effort to achieve a reconciled world by raising the level of relationships among people to a height where justice prevails and persons

¹⁶ <https://www.blackagendareport.com/speech-three-evils-society-martin-luther-king-jr-1967>, accessed on January 18, 2026.

attain their full human potential.”¹⁷

The Beloved Community forms as we focus on More and More Self-Control in ourselves and in our power structures, which is to say, when we Lessen the focus Self, and Loosen our grip on Control.

So “where is the Self-control?” after all? It’s in me and in you as we co-create the kin-dom of God here on earth.

Amen.

¹⁷ <https://www.gatheringforjustice.org/six-principles-of-kingian-nonviolence>, accessed on January 18, 2026.