

I received an e-mail this week from an organization, urging me to write my senators to demand they vote a certain way on a particular bill. It had the word *demand* in it. I was to *demand!* they vote No on whatever it was. I don't remember what it was about, because I got to thinking about that word *demand*. I see that word a lot these days, people demanding this thing or that thing. Or wanting me to demand someone do something.

Demanding has never worked too well for me. I tried it once, early in our marriage, but it didn't go over. Joan put me in a headlock. I tried it again this past week, with our new dog. She jumped up on our bed to sleep with us. I demanded that she get down. I said, "Maisy, get down!" but then Joan said, "Oh, it's alright, baby girl, you come sleep by me." So you can see where demanding something got me. If a man is going to demand something, it helps if his wife goes along with the program, because if she doesn't he's pretty well sunk. The dog stuck out its tongue at me and went to sleep on my head.

So I hope that group that sent me the e-mail wasn't relying solely upon my skills as a demander, because I'm no good at it. I wish I were. It would be handy to walk around and demand this and that and have people do it, I've just never been able to pull that off. I'm no good at it. People just look at me then put me in a headlock.

I have a relative who's a big demander. We'll go somewhere to eat and if the least little thing isn't to his liking, he'll summon the manager. "I demand satisfaction," he'll say, which is a tall order, since I've never known him to be satisfied about anything. If I were going to demand something, I wouldn't waste my demand on lukewarm soup. I'd demand an end to tyranny and injustice and presidential debates. I'd save my demanding for something important.

In these demanding times, I have come to appreciate more and more the Quaker emphasis on friendly persuasion, our quiet conviction that the best tool for change isn't the loud demand, but the lever of love. The Quaker William Penn, observed, "We are too ready to retaliate, rather than forgive, or gain by Love and Information. And yet we could hurt no Man that we believe loves us. Let us then try what Love will do: For if Men did once see we Love them, we should soon find they would not harm us. Force may subdue, but Love gains: And he that forgives first, wins the Laurel."

To demand anyone do anything is to coerce another to do something under threat of punishment or harm. You do this, or else! While we may succeed in getting our way in some small matter, we will poison the well of human relations and drink bitterness for years to come. Force may subdue, but love gains.

Force subdues, but love gains.

Property taxes were due this week. I was certain an error had been made, not in our favor, so instead of mailing in our taxes, which we customarily do, I went to the government center, girding my loins for battle. Before even speaking with the treasurer, I was convinced I was right, and imagined arguing so brilliantly and forcefully the treasurer would be forced to admit she had made an error, waive this year's taxes, and plead with me not to sue them. I'm having this fantasy conversation in my head, this imaginary courtroom scene, while waiting in line, and when it's finally my turn, I say to myself, "None of this wimpy Quaker stuff. Today, I am a righteous prophet, a fighter for justice, speaking on behalf of all who have ever been wronged and oppressed." I can just feel the red blood coursing through my veins, pulsing, throbbing. None of this *Force may subdue, but love gains* stuff for me.

People were in a surly mood. No one likes paying taxes. We want education and clean water and safe food and medicine and good roads and police officers and firefighters and a little safety net in case we hit a patch of bad luck, but we don't like paying for it. So everyone was in a foul mood, including me, since an error had been made, which I'm sure had been done intentionally to drain the last little bit out of our savings account. I got up to the clerk, who, as it turns out, was my neighbor when I was a little kid on Martin Drive. Shawn.

I've always liked Shawn, so I had to remind myself to be forceful. She said, "Well, there's an old friend. How are you, Phil?"

"I'm okay," I said, but I didn't say it with any enthusiasm. I didn't want her to think she was going to win me over with a little kindness. She knew why I was there, after all. They'd been waiting for me.

"How are your mom and dad?" Shawn asked. "I need to go visit them."

So we talked about my mom and dad a while.

"How is your father?" I asked, just to be polite.

"Oh, he's okay. He's in assisted living now."

"Yes, I know. I saw him there just the other day," I said.

We talked about her father for a while.

Then we got down to business. "I'm probably wrong," I said, "but there might be a mistake on my tax bill."

"That's happened before," she said. "Let's see what you have"

I handed her my bill. "I'm sure it's right," I said. "I just don't know how to read these bills."

It turns out there wasn't a mistake on my bill, so I didn't need to demand an apology or sue the county, which is a lot of work, suing a county, so I'm glad I didn't have to.

On my way home, I thought about Shawn and how kind she was to people, how she just wins people over with her smile. Force may subdue, but love gains.

Don't you wish that could catch on?

It could, you know.

You and I could decide right now to see what love could do.

With our children.

With our siblings.

With our parents.

With our spouses.

With our neighbors.

With one another.

Holy cats, maybe we could even see what love could do with these angry, bitter folks who think they can get their way by blowing things up. Wouldn't that be something, to see what love could do with them?

To see what love could do with politicians whose first reaction is to blow entire countries off the map.

To see what love could do with troubled young men whose homelands are so racked, ripped, and ruined by violence they've come to believe it's the answer to everything.

Wouldn't that be something, to see what love could do with them?

It'll take someone brave to suggest such an audacious solution. It would take someone like Jesus to suggest that. I'm not suggesting it. I'm not brave enough. People would get mad at me. But wouldn't it be interesting if someone did, if someone just woke up tomorrow morning and said, "Today, I'm going to see what love will do."