



SERMON RECAP

JUNE 28, 2026

Wisdom of Peace Making “The Story of Ferdinand”

Ecclesiastes 4:1-6

Proverbs 3:13-20, 27-35, 12:20

Don Juan Cobaleda was a rancher in Spain, and according to a story by Maria Popova in the online magazine “The Marginalian,” he raised a bull named Civilon who bore a striking resemblance to Ferdinand, the main character in today’s book. “The Story of Ferdinand” was written by Munro Leaf on a yellow legal pad on a rainy Sunday in New York in 1935. He wrote it to give his illustrator friend inspiration. The collaboration between Leaf and illustrator Robert Lawson was published in 1936 and became an instant - and controversial - classic.

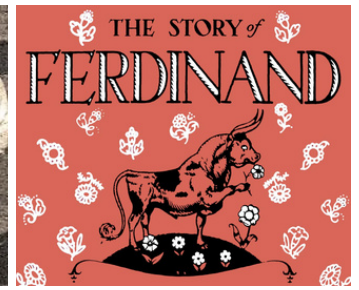
Ferdinand is the story of a young bull who isn’t interested in running, jumping, and butting heads like the other bulls. His mother was worried about him for being so different, but Ferdinand preferred to sit under a cork tree and smell the beautiful flowers.

Eventually, Ferdinand grows into a large and muscular bull. A truly powerful animal, he still has no interest in rough-housing like the other bulls. One fateful day however, he is stung by a bee. In surprise, he jumps and kicks and bucks around like a fearsome beast. This is witnessed by some men of the bullfights, and he brought to the ring as Ferdinand the Terrible.

There however, he smells the flowers in the women’s hair and the bouquets people brought for the matadors. He is not provoked by the banderos or picadors. Eventually the matador is so frustrated that he quits. Ferdinand is brought back to the ranch where he finds peace and quite under the tree smelling flowers.

While Popova’s article implies the real-life Civilon was Leaf’s inspiration for Ferdinand, the timeline doesn’t support this idea. Still, the story of Civilon was astonishingly similar, and the popularity of the gentle bull in Spanish culture might have contributed to the banning of Ferdinand across parts of Europe.

Cobaleda one day found his daughter feeding one of his bulls flowers. Soon, neighborhood children would come and feed the bull by hand. News of this gentle giant spread. Civilon was brought to the bullfights as a spectacle, people wondering if the gentle giant would fight. Like Ferdinand, he did not respond to the



provocation. Cobaleda called to the bull from the stands, and Civilon came for a final caress. Before the matador was able to inflict the final wound, a woman in the crowd shouted for a pardon, and it was granted. Civilon was treated for his wounds and was due to return to the ranch.

The story seems too good to be true, and in a way it was. Soon after, Franco’s fascist supporters burst into the pens, slaughtered Civilon and literally ate him for breakfast. According to Popova, “The July day Civilón was murdered is the day the Spanish Civil War began in full force, maiming the country for three years and stirring in Europe’s bosom the violent passions that soon erupted into the next World War.”

Ferdinand and Civilon became symbols of peace and resistance that stirred controversy in the midst of the rise of fascism. *Ferdinand* was banned in Nazi Germany and in Franco’s Spain. After World War II was won, American soldiers brought 30,000 copies of the book into Germany.

The connection to Ecclesiastes is not obvious at first. The exploitation of the weak by those who love violence makes life meaningless. So the Teacher, like Ferdiand, decides that simply not participating in the cycles of violence is better. The stylish matador and the flower-laden women are just pawns in the game that trample the weak. It’s all empty. Too many simply live and work “for mutual envy.”

The strength of Ferdinand was not found in his size or muscle. It was not shown in butting heads and being ferocious. His strength was shown in breaking the cycles of violence. He refuses to be a pawn in for the oppressors.

Lady Wisdom is calling us to justice and compassion. The value of wisdom is more than gold or silver. It is more than the pomp and luxury of the fancy fans of *la corrida*. Powerful fools will always seek folly. They will demand a pound of flesh or heads on a plate. The wise see the value in the aroma of flowers, of being true to self, and finding happiness in the shade of a cork tree.

**“Deceit is in the heart of those who plan evil,
but there is joy for those who advise peace.”**

NEXT WEEK:

The Wisdom of Lamentation, “Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible Day”