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by John Dear

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This week at "The Nonviolent Jesus Podcast," I'm welcoming St. Joseph Sr. Helen Prejean, one of the world's most fearless advocates for peace, justice, nonviolence and the abolishment of the death penalty.

Best known as the author of *Dead Man Walking*, Sr. Helen has spent decades challenging a culture that claims Jesus in the name of violence while perpetuating systems of injustice like the death penalty.

In the episode, Sr. Helen pulls back the curtain on the myths surrounding the death penalty, sharing her insight into what the death penalty doesn't do — bring healing, deter crime or reflect the Gospel's call to love and forgiveness.

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Sr. Helen explains the church's teaching on the death penalty and clemency, from Pope John Paul II in the 1970s to Pope Francis today. She describes how South Africa changed a culture of oppression through mercy and compassion and challenges us to ask: "How is Jesus being claimed in the name of violence by our culture?"

She shares personal experiences witnessing the execution of eight men on death row, and her interactions with the families of murder victims who have found forgiveness and compassion. Sr. Helen also speaks about the prisoners at Guantanamo Bay.

Forgiveness is a radical act of strength, Sr. Helen says. "If forgiving your enemy is not weakness, what is it?" she asks. The podcast, and future episodes, can be found here.

This story appears in the **The Nonviolent Jesus Podcast** feature series. View the full series.