

May 28, 2022 Sermon

Grace, mercy, & peace to you FIRST OFF: We offer prayers for Pr. Jon, Jeranna & entire family as they too now deal with Covid-19. Let us pray. We pray God's healing gifts will restore all who have been impacted by this virus and bring them to health. In Jesus Name, Amen.

My seminary professor of homiletics told us when we preach to keep the scriptures in one hand and the newspaper in the other. He was essentially saying, God's Word is intended to speak into the context of the day in which we live. Instead of the newspaper, today it would probably be the cable news channel or an app on our phones. If I were sitting where you are right now, I would want & expect Pr. Jon to bring God's Word to the news events of this past week. Unfortunately, he's not able to do that. The challenging task is mine. I have prayed God's Spirit would help me & it did, that this message would be faithful, & that it might help us all in our walk in faith in these most difficult/ challenging days.

With that in mind, let us pray: Lord Jesus Christ, your own mother looked on when your life ended in violence. Our hearts are pierced with grief and anger at the death of 19 children and 2 teachers in the mass shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, TX. We commend the slain to your wounded hands, and their loved ones to your merciful heart, trusting only in the promise that your love is stronger than death, and that even now, you live and reign forever and ever. Amen.

HEARTS PIERCED WITH grief and anger (righteous anger) pretty much sums up, I suspect, the feelings that most of us had when we heard the news. Those sentiments are most likely still very real. It is with heavy hearts that we gather today, hearing my imperfect words for sure, but words intended to guide, comfort, and direct our days as children of God.

In our 1st reading from Acts, Paul "very much annoyed" by this woman who continually was speaking lies about what Paul & Silas were doing, Paul said, "I order you in the name of JC to come out of her. And (the evil spirit) came out of her that very hr." As a result, the slave-woman's owners lost their source of income. They persisted until Paul and Silas were thrown into jail.

Like Paul, sometimes it's critical, as people of faith, to say what needs to be said, to confront boldface lies, and to speak the Easter 7C - May 28 & 29, 2014 3 Sermon: truth TO POWER. Even moreso, it's vital to not only speak but also to take action.

Pr Jon did not disappoint. In my conversations with him on Friday, he shared with me that he was moved by the boldness of Steve Kerr, coach of the Golden State Warriors prior to their NBA playoff game. He wouldn't talk about basketball but, instead, erupted in passion about the lack of Senate votes needed to pass the common-sense gun safety laws. Pr. Jon continued, "Kerr calls out the senators for holding onto power over and against trying to save innocent lives, like those of children, (those who go grocery shopping, or go to worship)—all those who have been targeted by gun violence recently." Pr. Jon encourages us to "inform ourselves about this bill and take action if you feel called to do so." In the midst of our lament, may God's Spirit move us to say and do the right thing!

Moving on, we can all be comforted and lifted up today by our Gospel reading. In it Jesus is praying for those who are sitting at the table with him the night before his death. Pr. Barbara Lundblad in the commentary in *Working Preacher*, writes: "Jesus is praying like a mother who has adopted these children. They belonged to God, but God gave them to Jesus to care for, to teach, to nurture. Soon Jesus will go away and he prays for these children with the love of a motherly heart." In her commentary, written many weeks prior to the one we've just experienced, Pr. Lundblad shares a story of a mother whose son was in their youth group. She tells Pr Lundblad, "every time my son goes out of the house, I say a prayer that he'll be safe." How many parents have been saying prayers just like that every day & especially this week?

Jesus' prayer doesn't end with those in his presence at the table. He prays, "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word...."

Catch that? Jesus is praying for you and for me. It's extremely helpful to me this week, to trust that God not only weeps right alongside all the grieving but also that Jesus is praying for me and you and all of God's children, regardless of age, gender identity, race, nationality, Political persuasion, etc. Jesus is praying we might be one in LOVE for all people & that the He might be alive in us!

In closing, I share with you something that has helped me this week, God's Word from Lamentations and a reflection by Pr. Char Cox, *LAMENTATIONS IN THE NIGHT*. Pr Char is Program Director for Congregational Thriving at St. Olaf College. In the midst of our sorrow, grief, and anger, remember:

“The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. God’s mercies never come to an end; They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.... therefore I will hope. God is faithful; Therefore, I will hope.” (Lamentations 3:22-24)

“I. Will. Hope. I will hope in the comfort of God For all who grieve. I will hope in the strength of God For all who suffer. I will hope in the restoring power of God For all who are despairing. And I will hope for the people of God To take up space on this earth That does not destroy, but that gives life.

I will hope that the fire of the Spirit Will fall again from heaven – Fill us, Move us to repentance, Stir us from our complacency, Blow through us on the rush of a mighty wind – And provoke us to act.

I will hope that prayers will rise up in an embodied defiance of words-become-deeds That value life more than weapons of war.

I will hope that God – The Author and Giver of Life – Will compel in us A will And a resolve to cast out Faux outrage And cast off fear

So that Hope becomes more than wish. Peace becomes more than a possibility. And life abundant edges out A resignation that the way things are Is the way things have to be. Because we do Trust and believe:

That Jesus does make all things new. God is faithful; Therefore, I will hope. I. Will. Hope.” Christ is Risen! Alleluia!

CHRIST IS RISEN INDEED! ALLELUIA AND AMEN!