Second Sunday in Lent March 17, 2019

All Saints Church Year C

Genesis 15:1-12; 17-18 Philippians 3:17-4:1

Psalm 27 Luke 13:31-35

Create in us, dear Lord, clean hearts. Amen

Jesus is told, “Get away from here. Herod wants to kill you.”

This warning appears as a gesture of protection and love, but it’s no different than Peter telling Jesus, “You cannot die” (bad idea), and Jesus telling Peter to “Get Thee behind me, Satan.”

It’s no different than Judas embracing and betraying Jesus with the “kiss of death.”

It’s no different than all the disciples pledging to stand by Jesus till the bitter end, but then they can’t even stay awake while Jesus mourns in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Jesus, get away from here. Your presence is not wanted. Your essence is terrifying. Give up on us and let us continue to live in the belly of the beast, in the gluttony of evil and shame, where even our good intentions turn into hate, murder, and mayhem.

Jesus responds, “Go and tell that Fox.” Herod, yes, Herod Antipas, a fox, a corrupt, power-hungry, duplicitous, and cowardly king, who got caught up in a web of his own making, to become a gutless executioner as he cuts off the head of John the Baptist. Yes, Herod Antipas, whose hands are the hands of an evildoer.

“Go and tell that Fox (and all those leaders throughout the centuries, past, present and future, who stand in his stead) that he has no power. “Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work.”

This is Jesus’ dog whistle. Ah yes, the third day. You have no power because I am the Resurrection. The third day. When I finish my work. The Resurrection.

And then Jesus mourns over Jerusalem, the Holy City, the refuge city, the city of Friendship, the city of Peace where swords will be beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks. “Jerusalem, Jerusalem,” cries out Jesus in utter heartbreak, in utter despair, as he suffers over the misery of the world.

Let us today, this morning, imagine Jesus mourning over Christchurch, New Zealand, as a white nationalist, right-winged terrorist attacks Muslims in prayer at Al Noor mosque and the Linwood mosque. As he leans over from on high, Jesus is crying.

Muslims are entering into their sanctuaries, much like our sanctuary here, who are walking into their place of prayer and solace, into their place of refuge, sanctified, where they can greet friends, hug their children, and find their place.

With joy and freedom, they close their eyes, bow their heads into the blessed earth, and give over their lives, in submission to God to embody a life of faith. It’s Friday prayers. The community has gathered “safe in their shelter, their holy dwelling.”

And then, as the psalmist so aptly captures, an “evildoer comes upon them to eat up their flesh.”

As the poet, Joy Harjo writes in her poem, *Singing Trees*, “Some things on this earth are unspeakable: Genealogy of the broken- a shy wind threading leaves after a massacre- or the smell of coffee and no one there.”

Unspeakable things, and yet here I am trying. I can’t get out of my mind the image of a video camera taped to the executioner’s forehead livestreaming his rampage, as he indiscriminately kills from close range men, women and children, whose backs are to him in prayer. Or his 87 pages of ranting hatred, or all the automatic rifles and explosives in his car, or his white supremist salute to the judge. His hands are the hands of an evildoer.

But maybe, even worse, is the image of the thousands of anonymous hands throughout the world who write social media posts after the massacre in agreement with his anti-immigration, fear of an invasion racist world view, and who believe Muslims to be the alien enemy, justified as easy targets.

St. Paul tells us this morning with tears, that people filled with so much hate “live as enemies of the cross of Christ; their end is destruction; their god is the belly of the beast; and their glory is in their shame.”

Thank you Paul, and thank you Jesus, as you gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, yet we are left trying to understand the power in the cross of Christ. The only destruction we feel right now is the destruction of the good.

Both Jesus and Paul believed and died for the idea that God will create a new humanity ***that suffers not the convulsive divisions of a life apart from God.***

Paul passionately prays with hope, that “Planted in love and built on love, you will with all the saints have strength to grasp the breadth and the length, the height and the depth; until, knowing the love of Christ, which is beyond all knowledge, you are filled with the utter fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:17-19).

As a people of faith, a people of peace, our desire is to be filled with the utter fullness of God. That is our response, our goal, as tempting as it is to want to fight evil with evil.

One of our beloved saints, Saint Francis of Assisi, who crossed into foreign lands to make peace with his Muslim brothers of faith, speaks about this fullness, when he tells his Brother Leo of what true joy consists:

It is ***not*** that all the great teachers of the world will adopt Franciscan principles, or that the conversion of nonbelievers will turn to the faith of Christ, or that the world will embrace a rule of life. None of that brings joy.

What brings joy is when Francis shows up at his home, tired, hungry, mud-caked from his travels, and knocks on the door of the friary, and then, as one of the friars opens the door, slams it on him when not recognizing “the beggar.” And then Francis knocks again, and even in recognition, this brother insults him and refuses him entry.

Saint Francis continues, “It’s at this moment ***if*** I am filled with patience and do not become upset, in this there would be true joy.”

The reason this is joy is because the feelings do not arise from Francis, but rather from the spirit of God filling him up, when he is experiencing “not me, but Christ within me.”

Other-worldly, yet a glimpse of the divine within. Francis is telling us that there is in each of us a longing of intimacy and depth that cannot be matched by anything that we might achieve or realize by ourselves. And when we experience ***the Life*** of the life of our soul, we are full.

The very fragment of who we are fashioned by the Creator of all Life, is gathered back into the Hands who shaped our beginning, and like the roots of trees “planted in moist dark earth between sunrise and sunset,” we are buried, covered by the earth, so we can drink and become whole… so that we “can hear the cries of anguish, the broken and the bereft” (*Singing Trees*, by Joy Harjo).

We are not designed to live a life where we cannot hear these cries. Invited to be in the Land of the Living, we dwell with vulnerable hearts. The truth is that outside this land, we are no longer human.

Sometimes it is ***in*** our deep aloneness, when we become surprised to find ourselves not alone. I was about 25, living outside Florence, struggling mightily. Two members of my extended family had committed suicide. There were no words, no containing of the pain. I was in deep anguish.

Yet worse, was the realization of how broken the elders in my family were.

My loved ones, damaged, incapable of reaching out, or supporting, or knowing what to do, so caught up in the alcohol and drug addictions, the fear, the denial, the paralyzing forces that can keep a family silent and alienated from each other.

It was early. I was getting on a bus to go to work. I didn’t have enough gas money for my car, my boyfriend had just broken up with me, and I was hungry. I sat down, about 4 rows back from the bus driver. The morning light was in my eyes and as I squinted, the whole world changed as the bus driver leaned into his wheel to turn. Held by the wide circle of his driver motion, I felt embraced.

Hugged even. And then this feeling descended. I couldn’t figure it out. What was I feeling? And then it came. Absolute, unmitigated Joy.

Even in the midst of great sorrow, I was being held by the grandeur of the universe, thrown back into the beginning of Time, into the glory of love and light. I was not alone. I was full. The True Driver of all…. Present.

I am reminded of that circle of steering wheel light, every time I lift up the chalice and with the host I circle over the wine as a sign of the Trinity and say, “All this we ask through your Son Jesus Christ. By him, and with him, and in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit all honor and glory is yours, Almighty Father, now and forever.”

If Jesus is the Resurrection, so are we, giving us the strength to say, like Prime Minister Ardern said to her Muslim citizens, “this is your home; you are us.” Or when we give thanks when Robert Azzi worships with us, that he feels safe in our midst. Or when we wait patiently for the Lord to show us the way to practice emptying ourselves so that we can be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Our citizenship is the fullness of the Kingdom of God, found now, here in our midst as we dwell in the Land of the Living. AMEN.