

Look for the Helpers

The Episcopal Church of the Resurrection

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Pentecost XVIII

Oct. 8, 2017

Given the very real grief our country is going through this week I am going to do something different for today's sermon.

First, I'm going to repeat some of what I was sharing with you in this past week's Resurrection Review about where I was and what I was doing when I heard the tragic news of the mass killing spree in Las Vegas.

As I do so I invite each of us here to remember where you were and what you were doing this past week when you pondered and grieved this latest unmasking of the stupidity and horror of evil.

Second, I want to consider a few of the simple ways that God is already providing us and surrounding us with his healing goodness.

So here is what I was sharing with you earlier this week:

The morning I heard about the most recent and horrific killing spree I was holding my newest granddaughter, Charlotte Rose while visiting with her and our daughter Jessica and her family in Cincinnati, OH.

The visit was such a happy occasion.

I marveled at my daughter's ongoing strength to welcome yet another new life into her already bustling home.

But that morning's news made me want to hold Miss Charlotte and my whole family closer, in fact, to cling to her with all my might.

Days and events like this render us all vulnerable to the sheer, senseless reality we call evil. Evil is so seductive.

It is so hard not to be drawn into the vortex of endless fascination of evil by asking the same question the newscasters keep pouring over: what could have possibly prompted such horror?

But evil is a bottomless pit.

It's like Narcissus trying to find his face looking into the mirror of a lake.

There is no use going there. We only drown in the bottomless pit.

Instead, let's look at this impulse to shelter and protect our loved ones.

The late prophet William Sloane Coffin, whose own beloved son died in a tragic hiking accident, once said this about parenting:

It is a heavy responsibility to be a parent. But we kid ourselves when we celebrate our freedoms without realizing that it is our *obligations* that give our lives their meaning. Children are the anchors that hold us to life. Cubby children clinging to our necks keep us low and wise!

Simply having children, however, does not make mothers. Nor, as I suggested, do you have children in order to be a mother.

"Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother." All of us are called to love each other into all God made and meant us to be."

Coffin also said this about evil:

Some people think that to do something truly evil you have to be some kind of Bengal tiger. In fact, it is enough to be a tame tabby, a nicely packaged citizen, safe, polite, obedient, and sterile. It's enough to be a nice guy, as opposed to a good man (Credo, Westminster Press, 2004, p. 120).

This coming Sunday we once again hear Jesus celebrate God's grace, his judgement, and his call to goodness, all in this strange parable about a distant owner of a vineyard who goes an outlandish, unreasonable, crazy way to reach those evil tenants in the vineyard. The punchline is that he even sends his only son in the hopes of reaching us, who by the way (little reminder here) are the *tenants*, not the owners of this earth.

The heart of Jesus' mission is simple. It is to make love the center of all of our journeys. As such he and he is always trying to reach us with a vision of a God's world.

So this week here at Resurrection we answer the question of evil by surrounding ourselves with acts of simple goodness.

This is our answer to evil.

First, some of us have been collecting our pennies and nickels and quarters to do good with the United Thank Offering that will be presented from every parish at our annual Convention next week. If you forgot there are some extra boxes in the back still waiting for whatever might drift in from your wallet.

This past Wednesday we restarted our weekly Bible study. A group of us ponder the deeper levels of today's gospel together for one rich hour. It is a blessing.

On Thursday evening our new Girl Scout troop gathered downstairs and shared space with our excellent Yogalign class lead by Lynn Weedmark. They both heard our heavenly choir upstairs working hard to bless us with their voices today.

For the past three days people like Donna Swavely, Marie and Darren Mitchell, Anne and Dave Newton and their granddaughter Sydney, Merry and John Young, Lynn and Ralph Schmidt, Maura Buzby, Joan Gurule, DeAnn Waterman, Gayle Gagnon, Carrie Holtan, Lu Hager, Judy Quass, Kathy White and Roger Barenz have answered the question of evil by the simple acts of gathering, pricing, and arranging our discarded treasures that so many of you have brought by. For the past three days they have challenged us all to recycle for the good of our parish and for the good of those who are now blessed with their new treasures.

Yesterday the gleaners from The Edible Tree Project to teach volunteers how to harvest and care for existing fruit and nut trees, and then to supply much needed food for the community. So far they have gathered 2,700 lbs. of fresh, yummy apples to give away.

To underscore God's whimsy and goodness, as it happens this is the perfect week to celebrate and bless the animals that have graced or are now gracing our lives.

As we all know animals are ultimate signs of God's unconditional love. We bring our purring, or barking or sometimes even our slithering friends who put themselves with total trust into our daily care.

Caring for them also bring us into the obligation to care for each other and to care for this earth that William Sloan mentioned.

And as if the Blessing of the Animals isn't enough of a reminder, today we also welcome

Second Chance, an organization that offers animals that have been abused or have no home a second chance at life.

What an excellent week to have a *petting zoo*, and for our little ones to enjoy a pony ride. Petting animals is one of the most healing things we can do. It is as simple as that. We could all use a petting zoo this week.

God is good, and this week, of all weeks, it is a great time to be together and hold each other tight.

Let's end today with this older prayer that Adam tells me he used for the several years he was in Seminary at daily worship. It offers a much-needed guidance for our church in the midst of our grieving world:

O God, we pray for your church, which is set today amid the perplexities of a changing order, and face to face with a great new task.

Baptize her afresh with the life-giving spirit of repentance and humility.
 Bestow upon her a more ardent responsiveness to duty, a swifter compassion with suffering, and an utter loyalty to your divine will.
 Put upon her lips the ancient gospel of her Lord.
 Help her to proclaim boldly the coming of your kingdom and the defeat of the powers of evil.
 Fill her with the prophet's scorn of tyranny, and with a Christ-like tenderness for the heavy-laden and downtrodden.
 Give her faith to espouse the cause of the common and powerless,
 and in the hands of those that grope after freedom and light to recognize the bleeding hands of the Christ.
 Bid her cease from seeking her own life, lest she lose it.
 Make her valiant to give up her life to humanity, that like her crucified Lord she may mount by the path of the cross to a higher glory. Amen