

In the name of the One, Holy and undivided Trinity, before whom all saints on earth and in heaven worship. Amen.

This is not a typical sermon. Yes, there is the proclamation of the Good News, even in death's darkest hour where good news is most needed. Yet, so much of our collective experience over the last week has not been good news but has been filled with the myriad of emotions that normally accompany trauma. We talk to each other, weep together, sing hymns and hold vigils, and there still is a long road ahead despite our efforts and longings the pain would go away. The journey before us does not prescribe how or when healing will take place, and who we will become. This is the terrain of the unimaginable, yet it is the horrible reality that is visiting upon us for which our deepest values and faith are called upon, and tested.

The Gospel today actually is surprisingly apt to respond to the questions of where is God, how could this happen, and actually, how does this continue to happen in and beyond our community throughout the world, day, by day, by day.

“Coptic Christians gathered yesterday in Egypt to take part in the funerals of a group of pilgrims killed by gunmen as they headed to a monastery last Friday. Yesterday, mourners expressed grief and anger as they left Prince Tadros church in the city of Minya, where the bodies of six victims lay in white coffins. A seventh had already been buried on Friday. The Islamic State group said it was behind the attack, the latest in a series by extremists on Egypt's Coptic Christian minority.” (BBC) There is so much polarization, angry rhetoric, and violence against groups throughout the world. Another white supremacist killed two elderly black people at a store in Kentucky last week. So how can we understand our times, and how do we live as Christians alongside the many victims of our day?

Gospel of John records many different players in the narrative of the resurrection of Lazarus. For the stories to become real we need to sit with them and imagine our association to each character. There is Mary crying with the deepest sense of loss and disappointment, essentially crying out, “where were you? How could you let this happen? If you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

There is Martha who just days before had been working so hard to serve Jesus, who gives Jesus the facts: if you rolled away that stone there will be a chance. Don't you get it? My brother has been dead for four days.” Martha is about getting things done, and when things don't get done correctly, it is hard to forgive.

And of course there is Jesus himself, who provides us the deepest truth that we long for. When tragedy strikes this passage in John reveals our deepest desire, that God's

heart breaks with ours. Jesus sees our tears, and those in the background, nameless bystanders say, “Lord, come and see.” How we have been those bystanders this week. However when the first word came out of the shootings in our community and the unspeakable deaths of so many good ones struck our hearts, we have looked at the Internet, we have grieved for the victims at the Tree of Life Synagogue, we have gathered individually, and all our actions are prayers we live to God that say “Lord, come and see.” In these prayers Jesus is present to the horror, and God comes to us, even if we are not sure how to come to God in this time. Such violence and horror disrupts the peace and certainty of faith, which cannot be what it was before, but our lives are deepened or transformed passing through such darkness. In such raw examination of life we must also uproot any hate that is within us. For it is from the seeds of hate that violence comes, and in such a time as this, we must examine our own prejudices, bigotry, and racism, Otherwise, we cannot give ourselves over to healing and transformation. We are responsible for ourselves before God who knows us perfectly and longs to heal our broken hearts, our broken memories, and our broken beliefs.

At the end, it is the bystanders who attract me, for it is they who Jesus calls upon finally. The resurrection of Lazarus is that which we all long for, the witness that death is conquered before God who has the power to raise us to new life. Yet, even when the act of resurrection is complete, God needs us. Please look and see those last words in the Gospel today: **“Unbind him, and let him go.”** There is a long road ahead for us. Yet, the good news is that God will call us to unbind the living, to release each other and our neighbors into new lives, scarred lives yes, but these lives will reflect journeys of pain turned into healing, and still gloriously alive, committed to live by faith, in peace, and with compassion.

Can we live into the power of God that raises new life in us, that calls us to be unbound in the Good News for us, unbinding our hate, self-loathing, prejudices and other forms of division we have been part of, either consciously or lurking within our thoughts just below the surface. Is this what St. Paul means when he says “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” *Galatians 2:20*

Hate has had its day, but we are called to unbind each other as we heal, we are called to unbind others as we walk with them in their way of healing. There is no prescribed way to walk in the days, weeks, and months ahead, but we hear in Christ that death

never has the last word. Out of this horror will rise new life, and we, individually and as a community, will be changed into something glorious, with scars that bear witness to the glorious Revelation of John, “See, I am making all things new.” From the beginning to the end, our whole existence is in God’s care, and when our time comes to an end, we will hear the sweet voice of our Redeemer say to us, “Well done my good and faithful servant.”

Now, to God who is able to do abundantly far more than we could ever ask or imagine, to God be the glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus, forever and ever. Amen.