

Homily – The Ven. Kristi Neal
Archdeacon, Western North Carolina
Proper 10C
July 10, 2016

Amos 7: 7-17
Psalm 82
Colossians 1: 1-14
Luke 10: 25-37

Today we gather with hearts that are broken
We gather to pray and be consoled after a week of unbelievable
Violence and death and hatred
And we ask, “What is happening in our country?”
There is a part of me that thinks perhaps we should just sit in silence
And give ourselves time to grieve this morning
But as I thought about our Gospel reading
I decided there are some things that may help us
As we try to make sense of what is happening in our country

Today we have a story from Luke that is probably the most familiar story
Jesus ever told: the story of the Good Samaritan
And we may think we are so familiar with this story
That perhaps this parable has lost the power
To teach us anything because we know it so well
Usually preachers focus on those who encounter the beaten man
On the road to Jericho
But today I want us to focus on the man in the ditch
The one who was robbed, beaten, and left for dead
Certainly we have all experienced times
When we have felt like we have been beaten and thrown into a ditch
Close your eyes and think of a time when you felt beaten up and alone
Now hold those feelings in your heart as we continue

Who are the people in the ditch?
Who are the people who are hated and feared because of who they are?
Who are the people who need someone to bind their wounds?
And to weep with them as they weep
I want to talk about three groups—there are many, many more

The events in the Pulse nightclub in Orlando let us know that very often
Our LGBT brothers and sisters are in the ditch
They are targeted in ways that many of us can't imagine
One of my sister deacons has been the victim of some of that hate
She lives right here in WNC
She and her spouse have had their house egged
They have had slurs written on their front door
Their parish hosted a gay pride event two years ago

Several hundred people attended, but they also had detractors
One local minister referred to the parish as “Church of the Deceiver”
The members of the parish were called all sorts of names
But the members of that parish put action to
The words taught by Jesus “Love your neighbor”
They were light and love in a dark world

Then less than a month ago, a man walked into a nightclub
Filled with people—just people enjoying themselves
And opened fire with an AR-15 assault weapon
And killed 50 people – 50 of our sisters and brothers
Some of them were LGBT and some were not
It was an action of hate—in a world that yearns for love

Will we weep with God’s children who are lesbian, bisexual, gay or transgender?

This week we find another group of God’s children in the ditch
They are members of the law enforcement community
The men and women who run into buildings that are hit by airplanes
The women and men who go into homes where domestic violence
Is taking place
They are also children of God and they take risks every day
They face addicts who are high on drugs and out of control
They face people who are angry and armed
And they patrol the most dangerous places in our cities
They are fallible and sometimes they do make mistakes
Just like any of the rest of us – there are some who overreact
Certainly I am not defending
What happened in Baton Rouge or St. Paul or Asheville
But the majority of law enforcement officers
Enter the field because they want to help and protect
Their fellow human beings—they want to protect us
What happened this week in Dallas
Shows us in vivid video the dangers they face
Five officers died, but others ran into the line of fire
Trying to protect the peaceful protestors

Will we weep with God’s children who risk their lives every day to keep us safe?

Lastly, the group in the ditch are our Black brothers and sisters
God’s children who are reviled, persecuted and discriminated against
Merely because their skin is a different color.
Philandro, Alton, Jerry; these are only a few of the 123 Black men
Killed by police this year.

Let me share with you what a friend of mine wrote this week
My friend is a Black Man, a native of Asheville, a college graduate
Well respected in the community
A man who has devoted his life to improving race relations in Buncombe County

“A couple of days ago I was talking with a friend in another state about the police shooting in Deaverview. His first words after expressing shock over the incident were ‘how are you holding up?’ I realized—sometime after the conversation ended—that he was the first person of European descent to ask me that question – and it made me think ---about how I am and where I am. So tonight I will be posting my words. . . How am I holding up? I am afraid—all the time—for my life—in my car, in my church, on the streets—and afraid for all those who look like me. I am in constant horror over how a traffic stop can become a life or death situation—the kind of traffic stop I endured a few months ago. I am grieving –for my community, for this society, for the loss of life, for the families—across this nation and across town—who are engulfed in a sea of sorrow and pain at this very moment. I am worried sick about where this next presidential election will take us as a country. And I am without answers—without strategy—without platitudes—right now, I am grieving and traumatized. It is fitting to ask how I ma holding up; just know that I—we—as African Americans in America in July of 2016 need time –to grieve, mourn, lament, manage our anger, and do what we need to do to survive emotionally and psychologically day to day. That’s how I am holding up – if you are interested. “

Will we weep with God’s children who are different just because of the color of their skin?

We need to take time to weep and mourn and lament

But the today’s story reminds us that weeping is not enough

I get so frustrated when people say victims are “in my thoughts and prayers”

Prayers are important – there is no doubt about that

And it is what we do when we love each other

The priest and the Levite in today’s story

May have said prayers for the man in the ditch

But Jesus said we have to do more than say a fleeting prayer

Love is an action verb

The Samaritan went over to the man in the ditch

He spoke words of comfort and bound his wounds

He gave him a drink of water

He put him on his own donkey

He fed him and arranged for housing

He showed his love concretely

Jesus calls us to do the same

It is not enough to keep people in the ditch in our thoughts and prayers

We have to talk to them

We have to say it isn’t right that they are in the ditch

We have to support and help them

We have to be willing to create relationships.

I want to share with you part of what my son wrote on Friday

In response to Orlando, and Baton Rouge, and St. Paul and Dallas

‘Every person we meet has a different life experience. If every person we meet has a different life experience, then every person has learned something we have not. If every person we meet has

learned something we have not, then every person has something they can teach us, something we can learn. At the very least every person we meet deserves our basic respect."

Love is an action verb

And we are all in this together

We must stand up and speak out against injustice

As Martin Luther King, Jr. said

"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere"

As people of faith we must stand on the side of justice

We have to make our voices heard when we see injustice

Benjamin Franklin said it this way: "*Justice will not be served*

Until those who are unaffected are as outraged as those who are."

Being a true neighbor means we are living actively and not passively

In the kingdom of God

As Children of God we must be outraged when we

See our brothers and sisters being treated unjustly

As people of faith we need to be outraged

when we see our sisters and brothers slaughtered by automatic weapons

We have power when we stand together against injustice

All any of us want is to feel safe, to be included and to be treated justly

This justice work is too big for any one person or group to handle alone

But when we join hands as people of faith

We can move mountains

And we may even be able to change our Congress and Legislature

Until we all see each other as worthy and deserving

Of the exact same system of justice

We are not succeeding as Children of God

We are not succeeding as a country

Action always needs to be undergirded and supported in prayer

So let us pray joining our hearts:

Almighty and eternal God, so draw our hearts to you, so control our wills, that we may be wholly yours, utterly dedicated unto you; and then use us, we pray you, as you will, and always to your glory and the welfare of your people; through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.