

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

First Sunday of Lent - Year B

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Genesis 9:8-17

Psalms 25:1-10

1 Peter 3:18-22

Mark 1:9-15

2/18/2018

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. Mark:

9In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

10And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. 11And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

12And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. 13He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

14Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, 15and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

The Gospel of Our Lord.

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

What Now?

Sermon given on the first Sunday after the school shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida.

I was going to start my sermon off with the usual “good morning!” But that just didn’t feel right today. When September 11th happened my pastor threw out his sermon that he had been working on and wrote something else. He broke that same sermon out again when my grandmother, brother and I arrived at church a few days after a devastating flood. My grandmother asked “why?” and my pastor said that she had made up his mind, that he would once again be throwing out the sermon he wrote and that he would preach the Sept. 11 sermon again. Today we wrestle with the same question again... Why? On Wednesday afternoon the shooter walked into the school taking 17 lives and injuring countless others. I mentioned it in my sermon on Ash Wednesday, a service where we are reminded that our lives temporary, but I couldn’t help but feel like something more had to be said. The only problem was... I wasn’t sure what to say. This creates a problem in our world, a place where opinions are as easy as a simple online share away. Before we even have time to process what’s happened people have moved to placing blame and pointing fingers. Sometimes it’s for someone’s own agenda, other times it’s to point attention away from one group to another. I guess it’s normal. In the face of tragedy we want to make sure it doesn’t happen again, and so we look for the guilty party. But today we’re left with the question of how does one think through what has happened in a thoughtful and

faithful way? Now, I think we can all agree that I'm not one who shies away from talking, but when confronted with this sort of pain, I'm not sure what to say.

But others are quick to call out the "REAL" culprit for us. Some immediately jump to a call for stricter gun laws. Now, as a gun owner and enthusiast myself, I have to admit, the arguments for gun ownership are starting to look pretty bad when compared to the good that might come from stricter regulations. The fun I have shooting would be a small sacrifice if it meant that others could feel safe in school. But does that really answer the question?

Others are quick to shout out the slogan "This country doesn't have a gun problem, it has a mental health problem." And once again, maybe there is some truth to that too. We want quick solutions, not prolonged and expensive changes. If we really wanted to create concrete change in the mental health community it would take money and energy to convince the government to fund programs for mental health. It would take us being willing to sit down and talk honestly about the ways we push those with mental health problems to the outskirts and often dismiss their problems. We say something like "they can fix it they only tired a little harder." But once again, does that really answer the question?

Others answer the question with a Facebook post that I've seen floating around. In it you see a t-shirt that has a "concerned student" asking God why there is so much violence in schools, and God answers at the bottom of the shirt saying "Because I'm not allowed in schools." It's bad theology, it's not Christianity, and I can tell you it's just not true. The quote is a misunderstanding of what the actual intent of the separation of church and state is on the most basic level. It also fails to take into account that NOTHING!!!! And I mean NOTHING is impossible for God. There are no places that God cannot go, no jobs too big for God to handle.

We have a God who is so powerful that it only took mere words for the creation of the entire universe to take place, and you think that something as simple as a misunderstanding of a law can stop God? If you want to see God at work, simply look around at this room, the body of Christ, active in all of us, carries out God's work in the world. But does that get us any closer to an answer?

Theodicy is the fancy word for what they all the "problem of evil." And that's what is at the heart of our questions when we ask why or how something like this could happen. If God really loved the world so much, why let so much evil happen?

I've resisted giving an answer to these types of questions from the pulpit, because our answers are things that are fluid and ever-changing. It's also the type of thing that often doesn't help. If, as my theology professor said in class one day, you could know for certain why your loved one died, would it really change how you felt? Would the pain be any less? Maybe the answer is D. All of the above... I don't know... But it took me a long time to arrive at where I am and maybe what I've wrestled with can help you too.

For me, evil doesn't make any sense. It can't, because when we try to explain it we often end up tracing the blame back to something like the devil, and then inevitably to God, who created the devil, and then God becomes the source and reason for evil. So no, there is no answer because evil is so absurd that it simply defies any and all logic. It's an anomaly in an otherwise healthy system. Does that change anything though? The 17 are still dead... the pain is still there...

So how about a different option? How about instead of trying to place the blame, we just try and listen. How about instead of trying to figure out the simple answer we just accept the fact

that maybe there IS no answer. What if we we work for justice, for peace, for God and love and take time out of our lives to sit down with our family and friends and listen to their pain and problems. Maybe we're all to blame. Maybe none of us are. But, we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. And as chief among sinners I can say to this group that I have failed. I've seen people who were lonely and outcast and just didn't have the energy to talk to them. I've sat by and watched companies and governments and institutions take advantage of people so far away that it made it possible for me to simply ignore the problem. But most of all, I've failed to listen to God when God speaks... So we're going to do something different today. We're just going to listen... I'm going to sit down and we'll have a few minutes of silence and at the end I'm going to pray. Will we get our answer? I don't know, but for once we'll be listening, instead of yelling and trying to place blame.

After several minutes of silence Pastor Tim ended the sermon with a prayer.