

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Seventh Sunday of Easter - Year C

A Sermon in Response to Robb Elementary Massacre

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Acts 16:16-34

Psalm 97

Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21

John 17:20-26

05/29/2022

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. John:

[Jesus prayed:] 20“I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, 21that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, 23I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. 24Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. 25“Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. 26I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”

The Gospel of Our Lord

Prayer

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

Amen.

Tired

Hello. Normally I begin a sermon with a “good morning,” but that just doesn’t feel right. So, instead you get the same welcome I use when I start a funeral sermon. Because that’s certainly what it feels like. I had a much different vision for how this sermon would go. When I met Monday with the group of parishioners who study the coming text with me I talked about how this week's sermon would be the first in a three part series that would weave together today, Pentecost next week, and Holy Trinity the following Sunday. But then... Well, Uvalde happened. Now... Now we have 19 young children and two teachers who are dead. (Did you know that they train doctors, chaplains, therapists, and people in my line of work to speak about death a certain way? They’re taught to avoid saying things like “they moved on” or they “passed away.” In our grief we don’t think clearly and so it isn’t uncommon to hear something like “well, where did they go?” from the grieving loved one. So, instead, we say they died, or they are dead. It can seem harsher, less sympathetic. But I think our “safe” responses are attempts to shield and ignore the reality. So, we say the word. Death. At Robb Elementary School 21 victims died.)

After the shooting I once again realized that my sermon would need to change. I had planned something similar to the previous mass shooting sermons I have given, sermons where I direct the sadness and loss into words of hope. But our sermon today will be different...

Because I’m tired...

I'm tired of preaching mass shooting sermons. While there is no official definition for mass shootings, most people agree that it's anything with four or more victims. I'm worn out from this reality, and I'm exhausted from the fact that I could literally preach on a mass shooting every single week of this year.¹ I can't believe that in a modern country like our own we see the death of 12 children every day because of a gun. Did you know that we've had 27 shootings in JUST schools this year?!² I'm frustrated that according to research gun violence only seems to be increasing,³ and that between 1966 and 2012 one-third of the mass shootings have taken place in the United States⁴ and that 98 percent of those mass shooters are men.⁵

I've shared this before, but it bears repeating. I did my first mass shooting sermon in the first month of my call here at St. Paul's. A year or two later, after yet another shooting, a group of my friends who are pastors were sharing online, discussing that it felt like every week they could preach on a shooting and how they were tempted to do something different that time. The Rev. Andrew Tucker replied and pointed out that we have to preach about it, because the minute we stop, we signal to the world that this behavior is acceptable, that this is something that is "normal." Pastor Drew was right, there is nothing normal about this, and I'm tired of it.

But do you know what I'm feeling more than fatigue or exhaustion? Do you want to know what emotion has been coursing through me the most? Overpowering the sadness and grief, I've felt anger.

¹ <https://www.gunviolencearchive.org/reports/mass-shooting>

² <https://www.npr.org/2022/05/27/1101774780/gun-control-debate-statistics>

³ <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/02/03/what-the-data-says-about-gun-deaths-in-the-u-s/>

⁴ <https://edition.cnn.com/2015/08/27/health/u-s-most-mass-shootings/index.html>

⁵ <https://www.npr.org/2022/05/27/1101774780/gun-control-debate-statistics>

Because I'm angry that this keeps happening.

I was 11 years old when Columbine happened, which I think for a lot of people was our introduction to mass shootings in a school. And yet, here we are, over 22 years later, still going through the same pain. So today I call on you to do something. This is beyond politics and above party ideals. I'm asking you to do something, anything. We're the only modern nation where this happens, and if you think this is a mental health problem, call your elected leaders and tell them to push for better mental health care. If you think the problem is the guns themselves, call your elected leaders and tell them to push for stricter gun laws. Remember, I'm a boy from Appalachia, I grew up shooting guns, and I own some too. But this is too much, it's not worth it.

We can get so caught up in trying to figure out the perfect solution that we fail to realize that what is already broken is so much worse than anything else we could implement instead. We can no longer remain complacent. I know, it's overwhelming, and the temptation to say nothing is hard when the problem can seem so complex. But as Pastor Drew said, our silence is more than just inaction, it's an affirmation that this is ok...

And this is not ok...

A reading from Psalm 13:

"1How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? 2How long must I bear pain in my soul, and have sorrow in my heart all day long? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me? 3Consider and answer me, O LORD my God! Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death, 4and my enemy will say, "I have prevailed"; my foes will rejoice because I am shaken. 5But I trusted

in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. 6I will sing to the LORD, because he has dealt bountifully with me.”⁶ Amen.

⁶ Psalm 13 NRSV