

Order of Service for March 21, 2021 - Lent 5

GATHERING

Confession and Forgiveness

P - Blessed be the holy Trinity †, ever creating, ever transforming, ever enlivening, source of love and liberation, our heart and our home.

C - Amen

P - We are unfinished. Our universe is unfinished. We confess the ways in which we attempt to limit God's creative power working in and through us.

Silence

P - Creating God,

C - Shape us into fruitful co-creators and faithful stewards of your design, liberated by your covenant to bless and be a blessing.

P - In Jesus we have met the one who, with his very life, showed us the power of love to transform the lives of all who are vulnerable. We confess the ways in which we steadfastly cling to our rights and entitlements, refusing to be changed, or even touched, by the world's pain.

Silence

P - Transforming Christ,

C - Move us from comfort to courage, from empathy to engagement, from prayer to policy change.

P - All things belong together; we are many, and we are one. We confess the ways in which we have allowed separation: from God-within-me, from God-within-you, from God-within-creation, to define us.

Silence

P - Enlivening Spirit,

C - Breathe into us the breath of your grace, that we may release our hold on the fear and arrogance that keeps us from knowing wholeness.

P - Beloved, God's forgiveness is fulfilled in Christ. Because we are unfinished, we are ever being recreated. Because we have met Jesus, we are ever being transformed. Because we are both many and one, we are ever being enlivened with the Spirit's power — the grace of God, in whom we live and move and have our being. Forgiveness, grace, and love are yours to have, and yours to share †, now and always.

C - Amen.

Gathering Song - 660, Lift High the Cross

Refrain

Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim,
Till all the world adore His sacred name.

Led on their way by this triumphant sign,
The hosts of God in conquering ranks combine. *Refrain*

All newborn servants of the Crucified
Bear on their brows the seal of Him who died. *Refrain*

O Lord, once lifted on the glorious tree,
As Thou hast promised draw the world to Thee.

So shall our song of triumph ever be:

Praise to the Crucified for victory. *Refrain* (Hymn lyrics printed under CCLI Licence # 11411292)

Greeting

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, is with us all.

Kyrie

P - Merciful Creator, you have made us to be your own, that creation may know your love. Lord, have mercy.

C - Lord, have mercy.

P - Merciful Saviour, you call us to follow you, that *we* may know your love. Christ, have mercy.

C - Christ, have mercy.

P - Merciful Spirit, you send us out as your people, that the *world* may know your love. Lord, have mercy.

C - Lord, have mercy.

Prayer of the Day

P - The Lord be with you.

C - And also with you.

P - Let us pray. [*Silence*] O God, with steadfast love you draw us to yourself, and in mercy you receive our prayers. Strengthen us to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, that through life and death we may live in your Son, Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C - Amen.

WORD

Gospel Reading

John 12:20-33

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour.

"Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say--' Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

The gospel of the Lord.

Sermon

There is a message printed on the inside of the pulpit for the preacher at New Life church in Los Angeles. Only the preacher can see it. It is from today's gospel reading: "Sir, we wish to see Jesus."

A wonderful reminder, *to the preacher*, of why the people have come. And it's not just about the sermon. Everything we do together, as church, has the same purpose. Praying, singing,

making quilts, pot luck suppers, studying, reading, talking together.... It's all about helping us see Jesus.

Mahatma Gandhi said something similar. It's just that it's a bit harsher, a bit harder to hear. And it's not just addressed to preachers.

He was speaking to a Christian, and he said, "I like your Christ. But I don't like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ."

It's difficult for us to hear that, but I think it's important for us to acknowledge the reality in that statement, because it tells us a couple of things. 1 - The world still wants to see Jesus. 2 - They are asking to see Jesus *in us*. And only by admitting that we have frequently fallen down on that job, will there be the slightest chance of anything changing. For the world, or for us.

"We wish to see Jesus."

This is a challenge! It's not easy for *us* to see Jesus, let alone the world around us, when so much of what we are bombarded with every day from the news, and in our own daily lives, seems to want to block our view of Jesus; seems to want to keep us from having that glimpse of the lighthouse in the fog of everyday existence. This is difficult at the best of times.

And we are not in the best of times.

Especially when we were confronted with the headlines out of Atlanta this week. *

A young man buys a gun, and that same day goes on a rampage at three different sites, and by the end of it all, eight people are dead.

This is a tragedy, no matter which way you look at it. There is no way to make this a good news story. It's awful.

For Christians, however, there is a more painful aspect to this story, which makes it truly gut wrenching. The young mad who did this... is a Christian. He comes from what we would call a "good Christian home." His parents have done all the usual "church things": taught Sunday school, served on mission committees, done work in the community. They raised their son to follow the same kind of path. And, in fact, it was the parents who ended up inform the police that it was their son who had done this.

But there is one more feature of this sordid story which we cannot afford to ignore, or gloss over. And speaking personally, I think this is the most painful part of this whole mess. This young man did not shoot people randomly. He targeted women of Asian descent, because he assumed that they were sex workers. In his mind, that's what Asian women do in this part of the world, and he saw them, according to one account, as "a temptation for him that he wanted to eliminate."

I find it incredibly disturbing how closely racism has been tied to Christian faith by so many people. We use Jesus to make ourselves superior, and therefore those "Others" are automatically inferior. And it's just a small step to de-humanize them. And it's just a small step from there to blame them for all of our difficulties. And it's just another small step from there to tell ourselves that our lives would be so much better if they were somehow gone. And it's just another small step to actively trying to "eliminate them."

And it's even easier when the society around us is doing the same thing. According to CTV News, major cities in Canada have seen a **600-700%** rise in hate crimes against people of Asian descent, primarily because various political leaders, in Canada and around the world, have been trying to blame China for the spread of the Covid 19 virus.

This is how far it's gone: as of March 17, Wednesday of this last week, there have been 891 anti-Asian hate crimes in Canada. 891. In two and a half months.

We can't point our fingers at others. We can't pretend it doesn't apply to us.

It's here.

And today, in our messed up context, we hear, “We wish to see Jesus.”

So. What do we do with this?

One place to start is by remembering the story of Jesus. Not the “Jesus makes me superior” story, but the story of the one who was oppressed by the systems of his day; who was considered expendable by the power people; who was ostracized by the religious leaders; who was regarded as a temptation to the nation, and who therefore needed to be “eliminated.”

One place to start is to remember that Jesus was always found with the poor, the outcast, the minorities, the “Other.”

One place to start is to remember the names of those who this young Christian deemed a threat.

There names were Xiaojie Tan. Daoyou Feng. Hyun Jung Grant. Soon Chung Park. Suncha Kim. Yong Ae Yue.

One place to start is by looking at those women as beautiful people who were created in the image of God.

One place to start is by remembering that the world wants to see Jesus. And remembering that the world wants to see Jesus *in us*. The world *needs* to see Jesus in us.

We live surrounded by fear and hate. We exist in a country filled with racism, both past and present. And we are called to admit that we have participated in this mess.

But we are also called to look for Jesus: among the poor, the outcasts, the minorities, and even in the middle of our mess.

And we are called to remember that this gift of seeing Jesus is given to us so that we can show Jesus, in a world that desperately wants to see. Amen.

** - Please note that this sermon was prepared before the most recent shooting in Boulder, Colorado.*

RESPONSE TO THE WORD

Hymn of the Day - 379, Now the Green Blade Rises

Now the green blade rises from the buried grain
Wheat that in the dark earth many days has lain;
Love lives again that with the dead has been;
Love is come again like wheat arising green.

In the grave they laid him, love by hatred slain,
Thinking that he would never wake again.
Laid in the earth like grain that sleeps unseen;
Love is come again like wheat arising green.

Forth he came at Easter like the risen grain,
He that had for three days in the grave had lain;
Raised from the dead, my living Lord is seen.
Love is come again like wheat arising green.

When our hearts are wintry, grieving, or in pain,
Your touch can call us back to life again,
Fields of our hearts that dead and bare have been;
Love has come again like wheat arising green.

(Hymn lyrics printed under CCLI Licence # 11411292)

Prayers of the People

A - Relying on the promise of God, we pray boldly for the world, the church, and all in need.

[*Short pause*]

A - Gracious and loving God, we wish to see Jesus. In our tiredness and weariness, we ask for healing and hope.

[*Silence*]

In your unbounded mercy,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - Gracious and loving God, we wish to see Jesus. We are surrounded by hatred and fear, and crave the love and welcome you promise.

[*Silence*]

In your unbounded mercy,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - Gracious and loving God, we wish to see Jesus. We are overwhelmed with racism and injustice, with displacement and death. Reveal yourself, that all may know your love.

[*Silence*]

In your unbounded mercy,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - Gracious and loving God, our **world** wishes to see Jesus. Inspire your church, that we may go to the margins, and listen to the outsider, and bear the kind of fruit you desire.

[*Silence*]

In your unbounded mercy,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - Gracious and loving God, our **world** wishes to see Jesus. Use your people to bring healing where there is sickness, relief where there is suffering, and unity where there is division. We especially ask that you use **us** to be your presence with those whom we name before you.

[*Silence*]

In your unbounded mercy,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - Gracious and loving God, our **world** wishes to see Jesus. In the middle of separation, in the middle of pandemic, in the middle of our broken lives, show yourself to us. And then, gracious and loving God, show yourself **through** us.

[*Silence*]

In your unbounded mercy,

C - Hear our prayer.

Lord's Prayer

P - And now we pray as Jesus taught us:

C - Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

SENDING

Benediction

P - You are what you were created to be:
created in Christ Jesus for good works,
chosen to be holy and beloved,
freed to serve your neighbour.
God so bless you that you may be a blessing,
in the name of the holy and (†) life-giving Trinity.
C - Amen.

Dismissal

P - Go in peace. Seeing Jesus.
C - Thanks be to God!

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