

HERE WE GO AGAIN...

1st Lent – Feb. 18, 2018

Genesis 9:8-17

9:8 Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, 9:9 "As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, 9:10 and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. 9:11 I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." 9:12 God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: 9:13 I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. 9:14 When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, 9:15 I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh.

9:16 When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." 9:17 God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth."

1 Peter 3:18-22

3:18 For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, 3:19 in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison 3:20 who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. 3:21 And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you--not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 3:22 who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

Mark 1:9-15

1:9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 1:10 And 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. 1:11 And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." 1:12 And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. 1:13 He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him. 1:14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, 1:15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

Yvette Dubois Platel sent her spouse, our friend the Rev. Eliot Platel of the Grace of Mercy Mission and orphanage some pictures the other day. It must have been an early morning in the courtyard of the compound that is now around the children. The sun was filtering through the trees which make up the natural canopy for the class room of rough wooden plank desks and benches which sit on the ground. I guess rain means no school that day. Anyway, there are these precious children. Clean, many in school uniforms, colorful ribbons in the girls hair. The set up looks like an old one room schools used to be with all ages of kids. Youngest to oldest back to front. Schools from a more innocent age. I looked at these children, whom we support with our dollars and our prayers, with their sweet and innocent faces, just like sweet and innocent faces that are here today and in our homes -- And it made me cry. I wasn't crying because of their poverty, or their need, or even for the fact that some of them are parentless. I know they are being cared for. I know they are being loved.

I cried because these children, in an orphanage in the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere, with smiles on most of those innocent faces, who surely face uncertain futures – are less likely, far, far less likely to face death from a gun in the hands of a person intent on ending their lives. (long pause)

I titled this sermon on Monday. "Here we go again" which was meant to be a semi-whimsical reference to finding ourselves, together, once again in the season of lent. On Wednesday it took on a different reality. 17. 17 more people. 17 more

PYC aged people. 17 more young people sitting in school class rooms. 17 more children of bewildered, broken and grieving parents. Parents who won't get to see them play ball. Parents who won't get to see them in formal and tux for the prom. Parents who will never get to encourage them to lofty heights or get to see their bright shiny faces on an Olympic podium. Parents who won't get to see them walk down an aisle to pick up a diploma or to marry someone they will never get to meet or to love. Parents who will never cradle in their arms the grandchildren of these 17. 17 who join the ranks of hundreds and hundreds and hundreds before them . 17 more.

Do we know how bad this is? There have been 1,624 in 1,870 days. In the past 5 years. 1624. Not deaths. Incidences. Occurrences. Shootings. There is a mass shooting – defined as four or more people shot in one incident, not including the shooter – nine out of every 10 days on average. Did you know that? You may scoff and say, 'but some of those are domestic violence.' And I will answer. "So what?" Innocent people die daily and we have become immunized. No tears are shed unless it's your family, or down your street, or under the gaze of CNN because it is so heinous it cannot go unreported. Because this incident, like so many others, will become as round as a soccer ball to be kicked around by a political process that since the first notorious one of the these shootings on the campus of the university of Texas in 1966 no administration, NO administration democratic or republican, has come up with a solution to a) get guns under control

and b) start considering mental health as a problem as big as the mumps or the measles or the flu. No other developed nation comes close to the rate of gun violence than what we believe to be the most accomplished, civilized, amazing and 'great' nation -- that is our nation.

Today with foreheads still a little dingy from the greasy reminder of failed hopes and dreams left over from Ash Wednesday we come to the 1st Sunday of Lent. We start off with this lesson from Genesis that says to that little place in our brains that keeps hope alive 'don't forget.' Even floating atop a flood of immense proportions that's enveloped the world, God is in control. God is giving us a rainbow, God is gives us a second chance...and we rightfully mutter, "Thank you God – for the promise." And then the assuring word 1 Peter that Jesus, willingly, takes our place and our sin upon himself -- "For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit," Jesus dies for us. That's good, right?

In Mark, we go right back to the beginning. Back to moment Jesus is identified with a voice from heaven as God's beloved son. From the tranquil baptismal moment at the Jordan, to the wilderness including wild beasts and the essence of evil. Jesus is tested surely, 40 days is a long time. Tired surely, intrigued by what he must do next.... but he had ringing in his ears, 'beloved son.'

And the angels waited on him.” At least there is that. But that means everything doesn't it?

It means Jesus, in the belly of the beast, in the wilderness, tossed about for 40 days on the waves of danger like Noah and the rest of his second chance for humanity saving crew, sojourning and wandering and suffering and dying a little bit like the people of Israel who traveled 40 years just to get started on their journey....so, too, our Jesus, endures...but for Mark at least...does so in complete confidence that he is in God's care. And Jesus begins his lent, his preparation for the cross, which is what Mark is all about, Jesus knows who he is and what he has to do.

And with Markan urgency the message is clear, lets get on with it. Here we go again. He says, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." There's a task to be completed. And here on the first Sunday of the five Sundays of lent Jesus, looking a bit thin and disheveled, looks at you and me and in all earnestness asks us if we are ready to get serious about our faith; if we are ready to repent and believe in the good news; if we are ready to place ourselves in God's hands; if we are willing to face the inherent and imminent dangers of the wilderness of our lives and our world. Here stands Jesus calling us to take a stand. Calling us into Lent. Into preparation. Into readiness.

Lent is hard. But its purpose is to bring to each of us the renewed vigor of self reflection and even the willingness to give up something that would hinder us from being as close to Christ as we need be. It needs to be the season in which we confront our own willingness to be guided by the Spirit of the living God to new levels of commitment. It needs to be the season in which we are willing to wrestle with the evils around us, even if those evils have friendly faces that seem for all the world to be right and good. It needs to be a season in which we ask ourselves who we follow, who we live for, what freedoms we need to protect and what freedoms we need to give up for Lent.

To be a follower of Jesus, through these forty days of Lent, to the cross and to the tomb and to the glory of Easter is to be willing to trust God while we take what may not be too popular a stand on issues facing us today. Trusting God means we have to give up our minds, our agendas, our position and our politics and take on the mind of Christ. Lent calls us with the boldness of Jesus in Mark to put our minds and hearts to work, not on the promise of a rainbow in the sweet by and by, but in the midst of local and international concerns of peace and justice and the well being of all of God's people. Maybe this year, with an Ash Wednesday massacre tearing at our hearts, we are called to seek an end to at least one of the plagues on the children of this land – and there are many, but none more horrific than guns.

Lent is when we are called to take all that we know about Jesus, the sweet and the sweat stained suffering sourness of the cross on the day he is crucified and live out our faith in the post modern ruins of a world ravaged by unspeakable evils which would destroy the world with a savagery unknown even to those clinging for life on the ark of Noah....

BUT!....all the while doing so with something that sets us apart. That allows us to do what we must do not in timidity, but in boldness of faith. Faith in the God who made us and sustains us and holds us in his hands. Faith to discipline ourselves to protest and resist the notion that the right to bear arms is without limit. Faith to declare that "The peace of God" is not simply a slogan for old liberals and appeasers but the hope for all God's children. Faith to know that "The peace of God" is not simply the absence of terrorism and war but the ability to live without fear. Faith to know, because we have it in our hearts that Peace is a way of life in the Kingdom of Heaven designed for us here on earth. To make change is more than making a declaration of need. It is a process that involves diplomacy; it involves long, awkward, patient, and persistent sitting at tables, talking and negotiating, building trust and with people who are divergent sides of the issue. It's a process that requires cooperation, compromise and common sense. But to do nothing? How many reasons to we need to take action?

Today there are 17 more excellent reasons. Because that's what Jesus would do. And if we are Christians, that is where our faith should be too. Here we

go again. Let's get to it. Naturally the question is: what can I do? Can you make a phone call? Can you write a letter? Can you send an email? Let the people who represent us know how you feel. Tell them, in the name of Jesus Christ, enough is enough. (Hold up sheets)