

Sermon for Ascension Day
May 26, 2022
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Los Alamos, New Mexico

Acts 1:1-11
Psalm 93
Ephesians 1:15-23
Luke 24:44-53

This is the Feast of the Ascension – Ascension Day –
when Jesus was lifted up into the heavens.
We don't know what that looked like –
a figure lifted into the atmosphere or a Star Trek beam up.

Jesus leaves our time, Chronos, where we watch the minutes tick by,
and from our place,
where we can chart our location by longitude and latitude.
Jesus transcends Chronos into Kairos – where time is without time
and place is without place – what we call eternity.

Jesus promises to return – the interpreters of the Book of Revelation
call that eventuality the Rapture and the Tribulation.

I'm not big on trying to predict when the end is coming.
I'm not big on thinking about the Rapture, or the End of Times,
or Judgment Day.
In fact, I'd rather not think about the second coming at all.

It is enough to think about now, this time, this place
because I don't understand.
I cannot comprehend a time
when so many young lives were taken, spent for no discernible reason.

Tuesday was “Footloose and Fancy Day”
at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas.
Students and teachers were asked to wear nice outfits
with fun or fancy shoes.

Tuesday evening I was sitting at home listening to raindrops pattering
on the skylight above me during the Finance Committee Zoom meeting
when my phone buzzed with an Associated Press alert.

The alert was an update about the slaughter of the innocents at Uvalde.
The death toll had risen to 19 children and 2 teachers.
The raindrops became the tears of heaven.

“A voice is heard in Ramah, mourning and great weeping,
Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted,
because they are no more.” [Jeremiah 31:15]

Schools are supposed to be safe places
– full of learning, fun and happy memories.

What do we say to our children?

What do we say to each other?

What might have been done to heal the heart of the young man who did
this horrific act?

What might any of us do to touch the lives of those children around us to
keep their hearts and minds from turning to darkness?

I do not know the answer I can only offer the words
of Bishop David Reed of the Episcopal Diocese West Texas.

“This is so utterly wrong.

“Words of outrage are not enough

to express our hatred of this evil done to little children
who simply went to school this morning.

Expressions of sorrow scarcely touch the depth of families’ grief tonight.

There is nothing we can say today to comfort the parents, siblings,
and grandparents whose lives were left in ruins by this evil violence.

“What we have to offer is ourselves. To turn ourselves, our hearts and minds, to those who are suffering in Uvalde – to reach out our hands to lift up and to extend our arms to embrace – *this* is what we have to offer, following the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, and following him in whatever ways are available into the pain and brokenness of our brothers and sisters in Uvalde and at St. Philip’s Church.

We have received power to love and to resist hatred.

“And we can pray. We must pray.

Ignore the cynics, and pray with all your heart.

Let your cries reach to the heavens.

Let your anger and despair be your prayer.

And listen to God answering in return.

Look for God’s tears revealed

and listen for his perfect and righteous anger.

Give yourself over to opportunities

to join in the Spirit’s work of binding up and healing.

Love with all you’ve got,

and never, ever surrender to the darkness.”

This is the feast of the Ascension.

Angels come to the aid of the disciples

as they look up to heaven to remind them there is work to be done.

We have work to do. What we are to do?

It’s just not that easy, is it?

So much divides us, and that’s the source of much of our anxiety today.

Who’s getting it right?

Who’s doing what needs to be done?

What do I need to be doing?

Am I doing enough?

We are part of each other. Distance does not keep us apart.

There’s a poem written in the 17th Century by John Donne, a poet and a priest in the Church of England.

No man is an island entire of itself;
every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main;
if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less,
as well as if a promontory were,
as well as any manner of thy friends
or of thine own were;
any man's death diminishes me,
because I am involved in mankind.
And therefore
never send to know for whom the bell tolls;
it tolls for thee.¹

We are part of each other.
So often we seek to keep ourselves
from being touched by the pain of those around us,
to insulate ourselves from the hurt
we might feel if we were to be attached to the world.

Funny thing – the word “insulated”
essentially means “to be made an island.”

We are not islands – no matter how insulated we seek to be.
Sooner or later we will be touched by the world.
This week we are stunned by the deaths of children
In a school 700 miles from here.

It is only the touch of the Love of Christ
and the Grace of God that makes the pain of the world bearable.
We are all called to help.
We just need to decide what it is we are called to do.

What that is I cannot tell you.

¹ From *MEDITATION XVII Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, John Donne (24 January 1572 - 31 March 1631 / London, England)

This day I can only leave you with Bishop Reed's prayer:

O God our Father,
whose beloved Son took children into his arms and blessed them:
Give us grace to entrust your beloved children of Uvalde
to your everlasting care and love,
and bring them fully into your heavenly kingdom.
Pour out your grace and loving-kindness on all who grieve;
surround them with your love;
and restore their trust in your goodness.
We lift up to you our weary,
wounded souls and ask you to send your Holy Spirit
to take away the anger and violence that infects our hearts,
and make us instruments of your peace
and children of the light.
In the Name of Christ who is our hope,
we pray.

Amen.