

Genesis 2:18-24; Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:5-12

Grace to you, and peace from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

There are probably all kinds of days that you can remember exactly where you were and what you were doing. This past Monday I was in my bedroom changing clothes when Marianne came in and asked if I had been listening to the news. (Now I have to admit I had been watching the Science Fiction channel because there's really no other channel worth watching.) She switched the television over to WGAL and we listened and watched as the events at West Nickle Mines school unfolded.

You probably remember where you were, not only on Monday, but other days as well. September 11, 2001, late August when the walls in New Orleans fell down. You might even remember where you were when you heard the news about Columbine or Oklahoma City or for those of us that might be old enough the day that will live forever in infamy, December 7, 1941. Now hopefully we can say the same thing about positive events in our lives. That we can remember where we were too, perhaps when we heard news of the birth of a child or the engagement of friends or relatives. But those days that the positive things happen are not the times that we say WOW. Why would a human being do such an awful thing? Those positive days are not when we would say how can someone hurt another person? And in the midst of our pain and the midst of our suffering - maybe in the midst of our despair - we **ALL** need to remember that there are some things, some things that we need to remember, some things that we strive to hold on to.

One of those things that we need to remember is, that I believe very strongly and very fervently that this was not God's will. Now I do know that there are believers who feel that well as they would say "God wanted another rose in his garden," or that God took these girls now so that they wouldn't suffer later and maybe that's what some people need to believe in order not to be angry at Charles Carl Roberts or to get angry at God even. But that's not what I believe. I don't believe that God kills children. I didn't believe that fourteen years ago when I held my infant son after we removed his life support and that's not what I believe now after this tragic event.

Because I believe, as we heard in those words, the opening verses from Hebrews tonight,
Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, ²but in these last days he has spoken to us by the Son. (Hebrews 1:1-2a)

I don't remember Jesus ever saying anything that executing children is part of God's will. As a matter of fact, if you read and remembered the Gospel lesson from last week, Jesus said in Mark 9 very clearly

"If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these (Children) who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea." (Mark 9:42)

Paul reminds us in Romans that we know "All things work together for good for those who love God," (Romans 8:28) and I wouldn't argue so much that God is causing the suffering - we can ask Job who caused his suffering, as I would say that **IN THE MIDST IN ALL OF THAT SUFFERING,**

that is where God is. That God can **take** that suffering and *use* that suffering and transform bad into good.

Another thing we need to remember, that faith isn't a hobby. I have to wonder about Charles Roberts. His notes have been quoted as saying that he was "angry at God." When I'm angry with somebody, I strive to resolve my issues with that individual, not taking my anger out on some random stranger who isn't involved at all. Now I don't think it is WRONG to be angry at God; I think, personally, some of my greatest times of growth in my faith comes at times in which I have been at odds with God. Yet to be "angry with God" implies that there is a relationship with God. But to get to that point where killing is the way to get someone's – or in this case, some Being's – attention, implies to me a very simplistic faith. A faith that maybe didn't get much past the second or third grade in Sunday school. Maybe, that this is a kind of faith that when we say the words in the prayer "give us this day our daily bread," that kind of simplistic faith, that stunted faith, EXPECTS for God to actually provide the sustenance. Like the manna that the LORD provided for the Israelites, when they were in the wilderness, this faith expects God to provide the actual bread. Whereas a more mature faith knows that God gives us the mental talents and the physical capabilities to have a job, earn a paycheck, to manage our money and go grocery shopping to BUY OUR FOOD. That is how God provides our daily bread. Expecting God to provide our every want is a lot like the Aladdin and the Genii with the restriction of only three times of rubbing the lantern, taken away. Expecting God to furnish all of our fantasies is on par with God as being the same as Santa Claus. It's making God, making faith, into a hobby. As my dictionary says, a hobby is "an activity or an interest pursued outside of one's regular occupation and engaged in primarily for pleasure." (American Heritage) For me faith is not "primarily for pleasure." Faith forms me as an individual, faith founds us as people, faith ground us all as believers.

We also need to remember that even though we have been confronted with evil, goodness abounds. We continually see on a daily basis, on television, we hear it on radio, we read it in newspapers, on the internet. And how many of our "hit" movies are all about some evil, evil "winning?" There is a new release of the "Texas Chainsaw Massacres," I cannot imagine there is a whole lot of good in a movie like that. But, I do believe that there is good, even in that awful event on Monday. There was a report that, in the midst of that terror that grabbed hold of the Nickle Mines school, faith and goodness stood out against the sickness that filled Roberts. Marian Fishes, who at 13 was the oldest of the captives, is said to have stepped forward and said to him: "Shoot me first," in an effort to buy times for her schoolmates. It is reported as well that her youngest sister, Barbie who survived, allegedly asked Robert to "Shoot me second." Faith, compassion, and goodness stood face to face with fear and anger and corruption.

Desmond Tutu was recently quoted in journal *The Christian Century* as saying: "The media tend to inundate us with rather unpleasant news. We have the impression that evil is on the rampage, it is about to take over the world. We need to keep being reminded that there is a great deal of good happening in the world. Ultimately, good prevails." And finally, I would ask us to remember that forgiveness is real. We have seen and read about those families that have lost loved ones whose children have been hurt, yet they have reached out to Marie Roberts and her children. According to an AP News report, many of the Amish have embraced Marie and their three young children (ages 2-7). Another article said that Marie would have been welcomed to attend the services for those who were slain.

We indeed live in an imperfect world. We live in a world where sin abounds, where evil is visible, and suffering is all around us and we don't know what went on in the heart of that man, we don't know what demons or evil or sickness drove him to stand against God, but we can remember the words as we've heard tonight:

“It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, saying, “I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters, in the midst of the congregation I will praise you.” (Hebrews 2:10-12)

And so tonight, let us proclaim that name of our Lord, let us together with one another share that unending love, not only with those of us here, but those all around us. Those whom we know are suffering and even more so with those whom we know nothing at all. Let us go forth, to share that love, and grace, forgiveness, and healing. And let us proclaim it in the name of Christ our Lord. Amen.

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