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Grace and Holy Trinity Church
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Galatians 2:23-29

Two weeks ago I ended my sermon with this statement:

I am a child of Columbine. I graduated high school a month later. Since that day . I have been part of lock-downs and evacuations for shooters and bomb threats more than times than I can count. I remember sitting with my sisters on the high school track the first time but the rest of them blur together, as countless college classes were cancelled both as a student and professor for threats every semester. I had begun to feel numb to the whole thing, until last month when my two year and a half year old daughter was part of her first lockdown at daycare because someone brought a gun onto the campus. I realized once again in that moment the reality of the danger with which we all live. And I realized with clarity that I live in a world where I do not expect to be safe.

I might not expect safety but I do hope for security.

I am a child of the Church. I have been raised in the shadow of stained glass windows and with the sweet sound of the pipe organ as the soundtrack for most of my spiritual life. I recite the prayers and chant the psalms. I pray and trust the Church, especially The Episcopal Church and its leadership to guide protect and strengthen me so that I along with you my brothers and sisters in ministry can create a world where violence and death and pain will be no more. I trust you all to strive to fulfill our role as ministers of the Love of God and the healing of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit so that my daughter and my son, as well as your daughters and sons, granddaughters and grandsons might know a world that is less torn apart by violence and hate and pain and more like the world we glimpse when we gather at this Holy Table.

This statement is no less true today than it was two weeks ago, but this week in the wake of the mass shooting in Orlando where it appears that two minority groups were attacked by an individual claiming allegiance to a hate group I found myself frustrated, angry and unsure about what to say to all of you today. The evil which is being brought to light in the midst of this national tragedy resembles a Hydra of hate- at times its Islamophobia which rears its head, and other times homophobia, there is anti-immigrant sentiment, and anti-hispanic undertones as well. So I found myself turning to scripture for guidance and relief from the horrifying images which I found in the media, and in conversations with friends and family. But this week what am I given but the Demoniac of Geresane.

A passage of scripture which has been used to vilify people who are differently abled, and has been used to promote exorcism as a “solution” for homosexuality for generations. A passage of scripture

which even on my best days I struggle with as someone with a history of depression and anxiety, and a family knowledge of addiction, alcoholism and mental illness. This passage of scripture is more often than not used to spread division and hatred in the Church rather than promote unity and solidarity which we need.

Yet as I thought about the Hydra of hatred which has reared its ugly head this week and started to reflect upon the many events which have shaped my faith and life as a Christian I found myself looking at the Legion in a new light. I found myself thinking about my generation and our lives which have been marked by a series of national tragedies alongside the memorable milestones. Once again I realized that the devil has many disguises. The devil finds a way to divide and isolate individuals from one another and from God. It is the devil who sows hate and fear and aggression and Christ who reaps love and grace and peace. We live in the battleground between the two. We have chosen the side of righteousness, We have chosen the side of love, We have chosen the side which doesn't differentiate Jew from Greek, Slave from Free, Male from Female. We have chosen to follow Jesus.

So why does it feel like we are about to fall of the cliff?

It feels like we are about to fall of the cliff because there is so much hate in the world. Outside and inside our congregations; arguments over sexuality, political divisions, issues of identity and inclusivity come to light in so many different ways. It is hard to keep track of who is in and who is out of favor at any given time. Let me simplify it- to paraphrase and update Paul - in the Church - everyone is in: LGBTQIA+, Democrats, Republicans, Socialists, Libertarians, Male, Female, Transgender, White, Black, Latino, Asian, Native, Immigrant, Young, Old, Rich, Poor. Everyone means everyone. Once baptized there is nothing that can be done to separate one from the love of God and once baptized there should be nothing that separates Christians from a community of faith.

It doesn't always work that way. People are oriented towards law and order. Laws are human made and not divine. People are, some experts say, hardwired to differentiate us versus them, in versus out, ours versus theirs. People devise laws to determine what is mine and what is yours, to determine who is in and who is out, to decide who is a member and who is not. As a member you are provided with certain benefits and rights as a non-member you are denied those same benefits and rights.

Here's the rub, the Church isn't a human institution, not really. We as people cannot determine who is a member and who is not- it is through Christ that we are baptized, and by Christ that we are adopted into the communion of saints. Despite our perception of it as a religious organization, despite the fact that we are governed by canons and constitutions, despite the fact that we follow to the best of our ability the 10 commandments, in spite of our presenting ourselves as a nonprofit, charity, or house of prayer we are not an institution of human design. The Church is the Body of

Christ and is an all-inclusive organism which does not discriminate but incorporates, embodies, all people.

When the Church ceases to be a corporate body which is inclusive of all people, we fail to live into our baptismal covenant, we fail to honor God, and we fail to be Christ in the world. In those moments we are more like the Legion driven off of the cliff in Nazareth- which is where we are standing at this moment.

There is discord between what we know by faith and what we experience in the world. There is dissonance between what is preached in pulpits about faith being based in prayer and action and what is spouted on social media about there being nothing we can do. There is a disconnect between the faith that I know as a Christian and the fear I live with as an American in the shadow of Orlando. I acknowledge this and I am wrestling with it day by day as the grief I feel turns to anger and disbelief and as I inch towards acceptance that this is the way that the world is, which I know will come again, as it has after every national tragedy throughout my lifetime.

I will eventually wake up one morning in the not too distant future and feel less hurt, less distress, less anxious. Eventually my heart will heal from this pain and then another evil will arise. At that point I will once again have these tears in my eyes and my heart will break and my prayers will seem to go unanswered.

But maybe, just maybe, this is the moment that will change someone's heart, maybe this is the moment when doing what little I can- giving blood, writing leaders, attending vigils, sitting with a friend, being an ally to a member of the LGBTQIA community, keeping the lines of communication open between those I might not agree with. Maybe this is the moment in which Christ will save the person and sacrifice the many faces of evil which plague them as he did 2000+ years ago in the mountains of Gerasene.

I am beginning to believe that it is through the little things that we conscientiously do that God works miracles, that God changes hearts and minds and souls. I am beginning to believe that for most of us, there isn't one large courageous act by which we will change the world around us, but rather a series of intentional behaviors which will bring about change on a case by case basis.

Transformation happens not when we change of the law, but when you and I change our hearts and minds as those who live under the law. This week I was reminded of this as I wept with so many friends and colleagues. The same folks with whom I celebrated last year, when on June 26, 2015 marriage became legal in all 50 states and with whom I danced when my Gay and Lesbian Episcopal siblings were officially able to be married in the Church according to canon law.

The law doesn't and won't change the hearts and minds of those who live under it. It is only through our intentional micro-affections, the small moments during which we intentionally demonstrate our love for the other, our love for the person who looks different from us, or loves different from us or

lives different from us that we as the Church will be able to incorporate and embody the love that Jesus has for us. The conversation over coffee. The hug providing comfort in the midst of mourning. The smile and pat of the hand when there is nothing to say.

The canons are nice and the constitution is good, but the Covenant between Christians and God is greater and more powerful than both of these. That is the standard to which our hearts are held- to renounce satan; to love one another; to respect the dignity of every human being. Let us remember and live as the Church which Paul imagined and which Christ created so that we ALL may be very members incorporate of this blessed body and blood.

Let the devil be thrown over the cliff and let us be saved- and let us show we are Christians by our love for one another in the small things.

Amen.