

Sunday, April 18, 2021
Sermon: Beauty in a Shattered World
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John 20:19-31

Friends, Patty sent me a message yesterday offering prayers for our friends at the First Christian Church of Portland. First Christians are members of the Disciples of Christ, another denomination that is very similar to our denomination, the United Church of Christ. This church is in downtown Portland and it has had multiple times when its windows have been broken, vandalized, during the last few years. And when Patty told me that she would like for us to pray for that church, I went over to their church Facebook page which shared a message from their pastor, the Reverend Cynthia Dobson McBride. I don't know Cynthia but if I did I'm sure that I would love her. She made this response and if anything like this would ever happen to a church that I was at, I would hope that I would have a similar response to Reverend McBride who said this – “Please join me in praying for all that is shattered and broken in our world. Pray for the lives of families and communities shattered by injustice, by racism, by violence, for future hopes ripped to shreds by gunfire. Pray for bonds of trust broken when some of those charged to protect do not. A virus of hate rages in the world in the midst of a pandemic. Having church windows shattered for a third time weighs on me for the sorrow it causes those that I serve but it seems only a sign of a much greater brokenness.”

Indeed, it feels like sometimes the world is shattering all around us and it's important to name that. And I love how Reverend Cynthia McBride names that shattering not just of her windows but how she names the far more important shattering that is happening throughout our culture. Shattering of windows is a sign that there are things in our world that are shattered, so Reverend McBride says.

I think there's great wisdom in that. Our reading today shows how the disciples' lives were shattered and it shows how we can put the pieces back together. The disciples' lives were shattered because their teacher, their friend, had just been killed. Their lives were in chaos. They were afraid. The same people who killed their teacher and their friend might come after them and so they were afraid. And here in our passage today, just like our passage last week, in these resurrection accounts in the gospels, Jesus comes back to his disciples and what are the words that he gives them? Peace be with you. Jesus knew the world is a dangerous place. He knew that their lives can be shattered in an instant. He wasn't naïve. He had just been killed and yet in the midst of the shattering, in the midst of the chaos, in the midst of all of the violence, he says, “Peace be with you.”

Is this the peace that surpasses all understanding? Is this the piece where you can enter into a world that is so often violent and enter into it with God's presence, with the presence of the resurrected Jesus with us? Enter into it and point to something more beautiful. Point to something more loving in the world. Point to something, as we said earlier, that is as human as sharing a meal with one another. Something that's as human as mutual aid providing for one another. This mutual aid that Jesus gives to complete strangers in his midst - that's the Kingdom of God - that's the Realm of God.

Notice what Jesus doesn't say. In these resurrection appearances, Jesus comes with all of the power and glory of God and what does he not say? He doesn't say, "All right now we're going to go get the bastards. Now is the time where we get our revenge!" He doesn't say it. He says, "Let's eat. Let's provide ourselves with the nourishment to enter into a world that can often seem violent and chaotic and point to a different way."

Rayah has suggested putting in one of these community fridges at our church. Yes, that's the way. Let's eat. Let's provide. Let's help one another eat. Let's talk about how we can come up with practical ideas to do this because there is so much beauty in the world. And part of that beauty is entering into the chaos and showing a different way. Oftentimes, I can listen to the news and it's just stifling and I just have this tunnel vision because all I hear is anger, hostility, how are we going to get revenge on our political opponents. Maybe that's missing the point. Please don't mishear me. Justice is incredibly important. We need justice for these events. We pray for justice while at the same time we pray for healing. Healing of those families who have been shattered.

In the midst of the George Floyd testimonies and the trial, Adam Toledo was shot in Chicago. A 13-year-old boy who had dropped his gun, shot dead by police in Chicago. Rayah has reminded us of Robert Delgado who was killed in the park in Portland when he was having a mental health crisis. Dante Wright killed while driving. I've heard many Christians come to our Facebook page and say that he had this wrong and he had a record - he had this, he had that - he didn't deserve to be dead! Didn't deserve to be killed. How do we enter into these spaces and demand reform? How do we enter into these spaces and demand that we not shoot to kill? That our police officers don't shoot to kill?

I was doing some research on police training and one of the main police trainers is a man named Dave Grossman who has this new-coined term called killology. Killology training. How to kill. The mindset that he wants to give police officers is a warrior mindset. Your job is to go out and to kill and be a warrior. Training police officers to see civilians as a threat is what that training manual does.

Jesus comes into the world and shows his followers a different way. To enter into, yes, the violence, and the chaos of the world. Peace be with you, he says. We're going to eat. We're not going to seek violence to protect ourselves. We're going to show the world a different way. A way towards justice which is not based so much on revenge, or getting those who got us, but on feeding everyone including those we call our enemies because in a shattered world we don't need any more shattering. We need to pick up the pieces. Pick up the pieces in George Floyd's family's life. Pick up the pieces in Adam Toledo's family's life. Pick up the pieces in Robert Delgado's family's life. Pick up the pieces in our cultural life that thinks that the way to protect ourselves is through the gun. It's not. The way to protect ourselves is by doing what Jesus did - providing mutual aid to those who are in need.

I look at the story of Jesus and I think this is the most beautiful thing. How could we corrupt it into something that it is not. How could we take the message of the man who said, "Those who live by the sword, die by the sword," into a justification for killing, for killology. What? No! Jesus enters into our violent world to show us a different way. He's not naïve. He knows there are risks and even in the midst of those risks there is so much beauty, there is friendship that's being formed. There are people working together for mutual aid.

Our friends in Minnesota message us and say we need your prayers because they're doing the work, too. Windows will be shattered, as Reverend McBride tells us. But that is a sign of something much deeper. That's a sign of our culture that's shattered by the myth of redemptive violence. The myth that says the way to peace is by defeating or killing our enemies. That's not the way to peace. The way to peace, the way to shalom that our Jewish siblings tell us, is the way of picking up the pieces in our lives that are broken, forming community where we're not alone, where we pick up those pieces together and say we're here for one another. We may fail and that just means there are more pieces to pick up, but that is the way to peace. That is the way of Jesus. And friends, may we continue to enter into a world that can be hostile. And may we follow Jesus and bring the Gospel, the good news of God's radical love and justice for all people with us as we pick up the pieces. Amen