

Sermon: Pentecost 5

The Rev. Mike Wernick

June 19, 2016

Year C

Isaiah 65:1-9

Psalm 22:18-27

Galatians 3:23-29

Luke 8:26-39

When I arrived here at 7:30 last Sunday morning... I was clueless... I had only the tiniest inkling of what had happened... and no inkling of what those initial news reports would turn into as the day unfolded... I'm not clueless now... and I'm angry... forty-nine LGBT... and straight... men and women were murdered... fifty-three others wounded... many critically... I'm angry because I'm personally invested in this... because most of the people who were killed belong to *one of the tribes with which I identify*...

They've been saying that Sunday morning's shooting was the worst mass shooting in American history... we can say in modern times... we can say by one person... yes... but apparently... the largest mass shooting in American history happened in 1890... against a different tribe... when 297 Sioux Indians were murdered by federal agents and soldiers at Wounded Knee Creek... when 200 of the victims were women and children...

But the massacre at Wounded Knee... and the one at the Pulse nightclub... have something in common... they were motivated by arrogance... ignorance... and intolerance... and perhaps on Sunday morning... by self-loathing... but there are too many other "tribes" who are on the receiving end of bigotry... hatred... and violence... those who endure racism... ableism... ageism... and classism... to name a few...

But our love of carnage continues in many forms... from video games to rough contact sports to actual shootings... and you can look up all kinds of statistics online about America's disproportionate contribution to shootings and gun ownership around the world... but the murders of twenty children at Sandy Hook almost four years ago... pretty much ended our gun control debate... at least maybe until this coming week...

because once America decided that killing children was OK... that there was nothing we needed to do in response to THAT... then it was pretty much over... this truth is very hard to say... and maybe even harder to hear... because apparently... being allowed to kill children... is THE right we as a nation have chosen to protect...

And just two days after Sunday's massacre... just this past Tuesday... House Republicans decided... for the twelfth time... not to vote on bipartisan legislation that would prevent anyone on the FBI's no-fly list... to buy a weapon... Nancy Pelosi wrote: *we have no right to send our thoughts and prayers...*

But then on Wednesday... Connecticut Sen. Chris Murphy began an unprecedented fourteen-hour filibuster... to try to elicit a vote... and I don't know why... perhaps in response to ongoing public outrage... Senate Republican leaders announced that votes on gun measures would be held... tomorrow... Murphy was given a commitment to get votes on two basic safety measures... on basic background checks at gun shows and online... and on closing that loophole in the FBI's no-fly list... so maybe there won't be a thirteenth time... but I'm waiting for the ink to dry...

The Roman Catholic Bishop of St. Petersburg, Florida... blames ongoing Catholic disapproval of homosexuality... on last Sunday's violence... by teaching that gay men and women are *intrinsically disordered*... he said... the church "targets" and often breeds contempt for them... and he said this contempt... turns into hatred... which can ultimately lead to violence... and he lamented the protection the second amendment gives... he wrote... our founding parents had no knowledge of assault rifles which are *intended* to be weapons of mass destruction... they knew only the most awkward pistols and heavy shotguns...

Our bulletin cover shows a paidagógos... a legally appointed overseer... who would be authorized to bring up a child by administering discipline and instruction... kind of like a nanny and a teacher and a personal coach all rolled up into one... and the ancient world

was full of them... and our Epistle says... *now that faith has come... we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian... because in Jesus we are all children of God through faith...* and I have no doubt of this... but we are not yet free... I don't think we yet own the perfect freedom that comes from knowing Christ fully... the freedom from those influences that kill life... not yet...

What have you to do with me... Jesus... Son of the Most High God... I beg you... do not torment me... the demoniac... the man... had so many demons in him... they named themselves Legion... I wonder how many demons Omar Mateen had in him... and what we could name them...

I think in a good way... modern people have named some demons schizophrenia... or bi-polar disorder... or epilepsy... medical conditions which have nothing to do with Linda Blair's demon in *The Exorcist*... but I also think we have been too quick to dismiss all such phenomena as psychological or bio-chemical imbalances...

One night in 1984... my former wife and I were staying with family in an old mansion on Long Island's north shore... we were in a third floor bedroom... and at about 2:00 in the morning... we both woke up at the same moment... nothing flew across the room... but we were both aware of a heavy... unhappy... oppressive presence in the room... we felt unsafe... but we turned on the light... and said some prayers... and soon what we both felt dissipated... and we were finally able to go back to sleep... with the light on...

Another time... within hours after he died... and before I got that phone call... I saw the spirit of my uncle appear as an oval-shaped mist... and enter the room at home where I was working... and move along the wall before disappearing... and I just thought... Uncle Seymour... who's been ill... has died... and he's making the rounds and saying goodbye to us...

There are different kinds of spiritual energies... some of them connect us... are expressed through love... like the Holy Spirit... but some are not... and so it is unwise to open yourself up to just anything... or dismiss everything we don't understand as just *something you ate*...

I'm not rushing to conclusions... but with the emerging details of Omar's presence at Pulse nightclub over two - three years... with his online presence in several gay chat rooms... and with the report from a colleague in his academy class who believed Mateen was gay... who said Mateen asked him out on a date... when the puzzle pieces begin to come together... it's not terribly difficult to see the emerging image of a man who may have been gay or bisexual... but who struggled against such crushing internalized homophobia and self-loathing... who feared rejection and judgment from his family... and from his religion... rejection which may well have been inflamed by the social intolerance all around him... the kind of harassment he may have noticed when gay people held hands or kissed in public that str8 people did contend with... the kind of persecution about which Bp. Lynch wrote...

We tend to hate in others... that which we fear most in ourselves... Omar may have hated the gay community because he identified with us... may have harbored so many demons... that he would rather commit this heinous act... perhaps mistakenly seek martyrdom... to free himself from his pain... rather than let anyone... even himself... think he was one of THEM...

For example... California state Sen. Roy Ashburn... blamed his constituents for his anti-gay voting record... but came out publicly in 2010 when reports of his DUI surfaced... Puerto Rican Senator Roberto Arango mocked a San Juan mayoral candidate and implied the candidate was gay... but almost four years after sending photos to men on a dating app... and after resigning his office amid those disclosures... he came out as gay too... and three years ago... Exodus International... the pray-the-gay-away Christian organization... ceased operations... and issued an apology to the gay community for

years of undue condemnation and judgment... by them and the Church as a whole... when it's president acknowledged that he was someone who was both hurt by the church... and who hurt others on behalf of the church...

But this issue is really much bigger than human sexuality... Sunday's perfect storm brought together homophobia... gun control issues... and terrorism... and the pundits will continue to argue about which one mattered most... but what really matters... is when the demons of division and accusation tighten their chains on us... when we put our own agendas ahead of God's agenda... when we put profit above public safety... when we make our way of doing something the right way... and anyone else's way wrong...

And ignorance may be one of the most powerful demons of all... because it keeps us from seeing what's all around us... blinds us to what's right in front of us... allows us to ignore irrefutable facts and statistics... helps us minimize the pain of forty-nine grieving families... the pain of twenty sets of parents... all so we can hold on to what we have... and not have to change... and those demons say: *I beg you... do not torment me...*

When asked about finding judgment in disaster... Jesus asked... *Do you think that the Galileans murdered by Pilate... were worse sinners than all the others because they suffered in this way? — I tell you, No! Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them? Do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? — I tell you, No!*

Jesus assures us that tragedy is not God's punishment for sin... he says we are all equally guilty of sin... and if any deserve punishment... then we all deserve punishment... but God does not punish like this... we are forgiven... we are given new life... we are drawn in close to God's heart for love... but we are approaching a time... we may already be there... when we must recapture the early church... when being a Christian did not put you in the majority... when it went against the *status quo*... when it

favored the marginalized over the powerful... but especially... when it had almost nothing to do with what you believed... and almost everything to do... with what you did... with fighting for justice... lifting up the lowly... and bringing comfort to those devastated by tragedy... how will we demonstrate our faith... what will we do...

Mike+