

Year B, February 18, 2018  
1 Lent  
Christ Church, Mexia

According to John Westerhoff: "The stories told during Lent help us to face up to our temptations and the ever present threat of evil. ... They help us face up to our blurred visions, misplaced loyalties, and wrongful desires. They help us face up to our blindness and the healing and nourishment we need." Rarely has there been a more auspicious time than now to heed his words.

The reading from Genesis today comes at the end of the story of Noah and the Ark. God destroyed the earth and every living thing in it except Noah, his family and the animals with him in the Ark. He did that because of the wickedness of humankind. God seemed to think that a do-over was needed for Creation, so that it could be more like God envisioned. But on reflection God apparently decided that it was not an appropriate course of action. And God made the first reported covenant in the Bible.

But as Prof. Wm. Loyd Allen observes: "The covenant of Genesis 9:8-17 is a stopgap measure. Though creation is granted a reprieve, God's purpose for a unified, harmonious cosmos remains in conflict with humanity's corrupting influence." And we see this too often, almost every day in the news, but especially in Parkland, Florida again this week - on Valentine's day, on Ash Wednesday.

This is a senseless tragedy that has played out far too often in our society. It was the 18<sup>th</sup> reported "school shooting" this year; 18 incidents in just 45 days. According to several sources who track statistics, like the CDC and FBI, approximately 47 children and teens (0-19 years old) on average are injured every day in this country by gun violence, and 7 of them die from their wounds. Of the approximately 17,000+ that are injured in a year then, about 2,647 die: 1,565 of these children are murdered, 907 die from suicide, 116 are shot unintentionally, and the rest from other known/unknown causes.

They are not alone. Almost 115,000 people of all ages are shot in the USA every year, of which approximately 33,880 of those die from this gun violence. Let's put that in perspective - in less than two years, more people in the US die from gunshots than were killed in the Vietnam war in over 10 years of war. According to the World Bank, the United States accounts for 46% of the population of those countries considered to be "high-income," but experiences 82% of gun deaths.

Now let me tell you that numbers don't really tell the story. Go online and look at the photographs of the 17 students and teachers who died this past Wednesday, because a 19-year-old kid with a troubled past/history was able to buy a semi-automatic weapon, one that I used in Vietnam for war - for war! I can tell you what a bullet from that weapon does to a person's body. But I won't now.

I will share the following story: Cassie Bernall, seventeen was in the library at Columbine High School in Littleton, CO, on April 20, 1999. Yes, almost 19 year ago! She was studying her Bible as she usually did at lunch. Reportedly, she knelt to pray when the gunman entered the room and was asked by the gunman if she believed in God. She answered, "yes." The gunman responded, "why?" but then shot her to death before she could respond. Imagine how many other "stories" there have been since then.

How many more years will we have to endure these tragedies? How often will we look at the numbers, but not look at the intimate details of the children or adults who are murdered? What, as Christians, are we to say to their families as they grieve for the ones they have lost when we do nothing - nothing - to try to prevent such deaths?

I implore you, do not just shake your head and say, "this is a tragedy, but I don't know what we can do about it." Don't think about it as sad or tragic, but far away. I implore you to go back and read the stories of these very real children and families who have suffered from gun violence. **Make it personal**, and see if you can live with that. Because I can't - I can't. In other words, utilize empathy, not sympathy in these situations and then ask yourself, what **can** we do? Because if we follow Jesus, if we believe in our Episcopal tradition at all, we cannot sit idly by while this evil continues.

Lent is a time of reflection. But reflection should lead to action. Please pray and think about this particular evil in our world and then do something!

In the name of the one God, the Creator, the Word and the Spirit. Amen