

Year B, June 24, 2018  
5 Pentecost (Proper 7)  
Christ Church, Mexia

The late Rev. Billy Graham told about a letter written by John Steinbeck to Adlai Stevenson many years ago in his book, *World Aflame*. In it, Steinbeck said: "There is a creeping all-pervading gas of immorality which starts in the nursery and does not stop until it reaches the highest offices both corporate and governmental." Sadly, there is too much evidence to support him.

Before talking about the gospel reading this morning, let me recall for you the context in which the author of Mark is writing. The Rev. Richard Burden describes it thus:

Mark is writing for a community grappling with how to include those who are different, those who have historically been enemies, those looked upon as sinners, outsiders as dangerous.

Mark's community is wrestling with questions like

- If Gentiles come into this mostly Jewish community, do they have to be circumcised?
- Do we *all* have to follow the same dietary laws?
- How do we accept someone into this community if they don't read scripture the way we do?
- How do we accept someone who looks different?
- Someone who speaks another language?

And I won't prolong this list; there are more considerations that we raised in our adult education this spring about fear of the other and racism.

Jesus invites the disciples to go on a journey to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, a body of water that was known for its fierce storms, and it was night. These are the elements often found in scary movies. But Jesus, even today, invites us to go on scary journeys, pushing the limits of our comfort zones – knowing that Jesus will be with us, to help us, as he does in the gospel story. And today, we have refugees fleeing violence, traveling thousands of miles with very little money,

looking for safety and opportunity to provide a decent life for their family. How scary must that be for them?

I'm not going to debate whether or not we can accept all of them into our country, but surely they should be treated with respect and dignity as human beings, whether among us for a short time or a long time. The Episcopal Church has published a statement, one signed by the heads of many different religious organizations, such as, the United Methodist Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Mennonite Church, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Islamic Society of North America, the Union for Reform Judaism, as well as our Presiding Bishop, and others too numerous to mention here. In part, it states: "We affirm the family as a foundational societal structure to support human community and understand the household as an estate blessed by God. The security of the family provides critical mental, physical and emotional support to the development and well-being of children... Tearing children away from parents who have made a dangerous journey to provide a safe and sufficient life for them is unnecessarily cruel and detrimental to the well-being of parents and children."

And our Diocesan Bishop, Andy, has asked that I share the following statement with you. "Families are the bedrock of American society, and our government has the discretion to ensure that young children are not separated from their mothers and fathers and exposed to irreparable harm and trauma. Separating babies from their mothers is not only unconscionable, it is immoral.

Superior orders will not be an ethical defense for the legacy of pain being inflicted upon these children or the violence to families being woven into the fabric of our future. These actions do irreparable harm, are not proportional to the crime, betray our covenant with God in both the Old and New Testaments, subvert American family values, and are patently inhumane.

Our government leaders have the ability to uphold our laws, protect our borders, and ensure that families are not separated.

Yet, these families – who are in crisis in their native lands – now face even more uncertainty because those in power are not taking the responsibility of leadership. Our society's actions reveal not only what our government values but America's values. How we handle this crisis reveals if we are the great and civilized society our immigrant founding fathers dreamed or if that dream is over. This is a defining moment for America."

Some of you may take these comments politically, and I'm sorry for that. They are simply an attempt to remind us of our history, our beliefs and especially our Baptismal Covenant. Christ was once a refugee, fleeing persecution and violence. Ironically, this past Wednesday, June 20<sup>th</sup>, happened to be World Refugee Day, when we were called to remember the millions, about 25 million to be more exact, fleeing their countries as refugees. We are seeing only a very small portion of them at our borders. And these refugees are only part of the 68 million people who have been made homeless by war and other oppression around the world. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, issued a statement on Wednesday in which he said: "We as a Church, and as individual Christians and Episcopalians, must be passionately committed to helping refugees and internally displaced persons in the World." And thankfully we are and have been for some time. But more is clearly needed. He also asked that we recall that God came to us in the vulnerability of a child, a child whose life was in danger – whose parents had to flee to another country.

In closing let me return to the words of Rev. Burden, who explains that Jesus asked his disciples, and us, to go on these scary voyages so that we may learn **to act in accordance with our faith rather than our fear**. So that we can develop the hope, peace, courage and grace "(t)hat enables us to open wide our hearts to any and all who seek Christ, to all who are marginalized, to all whose stories we need to hear in order for us to recognize – and more fully participate in – the spread of God's reign of justice and peace..." so that we might one day live in unity.

Recall the words of our processional hymn: "There's a wideness in God's mercy... there's a kindness in his justice... there is welcome for the sinner..." These are the principles by which we should make our decisions.

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