

Second Sunday in Lent March 17 2019

Luke 13:31-35

“Hello brother.”

These are the words reportedly spoken by a Muslim worshipper at the Al Noor Mosque in Christchurch, NZ two days ago. Spoken to a man, dressed in black camouflage and carrying a semi-automatic rifle, who had walked in the door and was pointing that weapon at him.

“Hello brother.” Words spoken just before he was gunned down, by that same man. A man motivated by an ideology that says because he was not Christian, was not Anglo, that he was not worthy to live. An ideology that saw those he was about to kill as invaders, not people, put a pestilence that needed to be wiped out. A man whose manifesto described a desire to stir hatred and division.

“Hello brother.” A greeting that we might share with someone who entered our place of worship. A recognition immediately of relationship that extends beyond blood, beyond race. That is true in the depths of our being. That we are created by the same God. That we both are created in the image of that God.

A recognition that was unrecognizable to the gunman.

When threatened with certain death, this Muslim man did not curse him, did not seek to strike out in return. Instead, he spoke truth. “Hello Brother”.

And then was shot dead by his brother.

I’m tired of preaching this sermon. One I have preached after the terrorist attacks in Paris 2015 that killed 130 and wounded almost 500. The Orlando Nightclub

shooting of 2016 that killed 50 and wounded 53. I'm tired of talking about the latest mass shooting motivated by hatred. Of having to remind myself and each other time and again; this is not who God created or calls us to be!

This, this is what happens when we lose touch with the fact that we are the beloved creations of God. When we feel that our way is better. When we abandon the commandments of God. When we become enemies of the Cross of Christ, when our god is our bellies- what fills us and makes us feel good. When the things we glory in are the very things of which we should be ashamed. When we believe we know better and set our minds on earthly things.

Even more than my anger, my frustration over these things, I cry the same tears Paul does when I think of them. How immensely sad it must make God. To see God's children kill one another.

I pity that young gunman. Who was so blinded by his hatred, the indoctrination of his soul, that he could not see those fellow human beings as anything but "other". Who missed the hope, the life that was presented to him in that first encounter.

Hello brother.

Gathered at the table on Maundy Thursday, Christ's final commandment to his disciples, to us, is to love one another. As I have loved you, so also love one another.

Agape- that self-sacrificial other centered love. A love that was not just for some people, but that expanded to include all people. A love that, even when challenged and threatened with death. Didn't return hate for hate. Evil for Evil.

“Hey Jesus,” the Pharisees warn, “you better hit the road, Herod is looking to kill you.” The Herod mentioned is Herod Antipas, ruler of the territory of Galilee. He was a man with a burning ambition to retain his kingdom and perhaps to gain more. From what we know from history there wasn’t much that would stand in his way. He wasn’t above having those who threatened his rule killed. So, while it is not a gunman in front of him, this is not an idle threat.

Jesus’ responds, “Tell that fox. Look, I’m doing my work here (healing and casting out demons) and when I’m done, I’ll move along.”

See, Jesus doesn’t go all attack dog on Herod. He doesn’t denounce Herod’s reign. Spread manifestos calling for his extermination. He doesn’t criticize his lack of humanity. He doesn’t call for his removal or claim his throne. Jesus doesn’t do or say anything overtly political or violent. Rather, he seems to be saying, Look, I’m no threat to you. I’m not anti-Herod, I’m for this; healing and wholeness, love for all those who are hurting.

Even a 28-year-old man filled with hate.

Hello brother.

I don’t know what else to say than this is not us! Whether in words or in actions to kill others. To despise others. To turn them into something other than who they are; created in the image of God, worthy of love and respect. There’s nuance there, but that’s at the core.

In the end, today, the good news for me is the one Jesus tells us. The one that he represents. That we have a God whose only desire, is to gather us like a hen gathers her chicks under her wings. To shelter us. Warm us. Protect us. To show

us that all of us; Muslim, Jew, Christian, White, Black, Asian, Hispanic, all of us are children from the same hen. Created in the image of the same God. Beloved by God.

The good news is that despite all the Herod's and gunmen in mosques. Despite all the less violent but no less lethal ways we "kill" one another (take a look at Luther's explanation of the fifth commandment). We have a God who desires, wishes above everything to gather us together. To demonstrate God's love for all of us. Who expresses that desire again and again in scripture. Who relentlessly pursues, reaches out to, and sustains, us, God's people. The fullest expression of that desire, that reaching out is in Jesus Christ. Who on the cross, we put him on, spoke his own words of peace, "Father, forgive them. They do not know what they are doing."

Hello brother.

Perhaps the best we can do today is to come and lament/confess to God about all the ways we; God's children, kill each other. To gather together and experience in our fellowship and in this meal of Bread and Wine; Body and Blood, what it is like to Gather under the wings of our God. To experience, in some small but real way, that peace, that fellowship with all people. To see how much better a life that is. And then to go out into our days this week, filled by that experience, determined in ways big and small; whether spoken aloud or in our hearts- but expressed firmly in our actions towards all who we meet; To greet them- Hello, sister. Hello, brother. Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy- may it be so.