

On Tuesday of this week an 18 year old posted on the Internet that he had bought 2 automatic weapons, he killed his Grandmother, went to the local Elementary School and killed 19 children and their two teachers. As horrific as that is, Mass Shootings like this have happened 217 times in the first 150 days of this year and it is only Memorial Day. Columbine should have been enough! Sandy Hook Elementary, Stillman Douglas... A week ago it was mass murder at a Grocery Store in Buffalo and another at a Presbyterian Church in California. We can come up with all kinds of excuses and people to blame... Underneath it all, there is just too much hate, too much anger.

Midweek, I was prepared to say only that, and sit down. What more needs be said?

However, I received an email from one of our flock, saying that they were not healthy enough to come to worship just now, but she wanted to say

Prayers are okay, but they are not helping! So what else can we do? Is it about guns? Mental help? I have so many questions and want to DO something. So what to do? Please help us with something this Sunday if possible. I will be listening. Thank you for all you do and for your thoughts and prayers.

The difficulty is that when a preacher reads Scripture that says "Thou shalt not steal" most would say "Good Sermon!" When the preacher says "Thou shalt not steal thy neighbors' chickens" Many will say "Preacher you are meddling in politics!"

I know full well we are in the State of Arizona, home to John Wayne and Yosemite Sam, where in 2020 alone there were over 665,000 guns sold, and there have been more than 4.3 million background checks on legal gun purchases over the last decade. So for many in our flock, that is a non-starter.

The fact of the matter is that throughout human history when there have been downturns in the economy, or health crises, there have been efforts to scapegoat this ethnic group, that racial population or the poor. And issues of Mental Health could cover a majority of our population, especially following COVID when isolation has made us all depressed.

So as a pastor, I turn to Scripture... AND while there are many stories of individuals feeling very alone, Moses, Jonah, Paul,... what I hear in each of these passages is the differences that are made by relationships, the POWER OF PRESENCE.

Elijah had contested with 450 Prophets of Baal and another 400 prophets of Asherah who supported Queen Jezebel... and when the battle was done Elijah had killed all 850 of the prophets of Jezebel, when suddenly he was very much afraid. He ran searching for the CAVE where Moses was hidden by the hand of God, searching for answers, for proof of God and righteousness, when a STILL, SMALL VOICE asked "What are you doing here, Elijah?" Even when you feel alone, God still has another 7,000 who have never bent their knee to any idol. "Go anoint a new King for Syria, and another to be King of Israel, and after that find Elisha to apprentice with Elijah." What does Elijah do first, He goes looking for Elisha to pass off the problems of the world.

AND Here, soon thereafter, the two are visiting all of the ancient religious sites, as all the company of Prophets mutter: "Elisha, you know what is going to happen don't you?" But when asked by Elijah what he desires, Elisha asks for a double share of everything that has happened to Elijah, another way of saying this is "I want to know my own experience and yours with me." This gives Elijah the assurance to cross the Jordan and be carried up in the whirlwind; as well as providing Elisha the faith to strike the water crying out "Where is the God of Elijah?" And just like Moses with the Red Sea the waters are parted!

Paul and Silas, are arrested, whipped and beaten and put into a prison, when an Earthquake occurs. Now before we go dismissing the power of prayer, we have to wonder whether their prayers and singing hymns set Paul and Silas free? Be very careful what you are praying during the Hymnsing this afternoon!

When the Earthquake settles, the Jailor is filled with fear, because he was responsible for keeping these two dangerous strangers imprisoned. He was about to take his life for having allowed their escape from punishment, when they cry out to him, that they are still present with him! And there is this marvelous exchange, between the Jailor asking "What must I do to saved?" Meaning death and punishment, and Paul saying "You need to be Baptized!"

What I hear in each of these, is that shooting people does not make anyone a success. Thankfully, those reporting the stories have quickly forgotten the persons who murdered others, and remembered those who defended others, who tried to make a difference. When we are most afraid, we need to join together in fellowship and faith, we need to pray together, trusting God.

Among the most important matters of our lives is whether our presence in life has made a difference. Emmerson is attributed with stating that "Success is not being famous or infamous. Success is laughing with others often and much; winning the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children; earning the honest appreciation of critics and enduring the betrayal of false friends; appreciating beauty, especially in others; to leave the world a bit better whether by a healthy child, a garden patch, or a redeemed social condition; to know that One Life has breathed easier because you lived, this is to have succeeded."

Thank you for being part of this BODY of Christ at this time, Thank you for being part of my life.