

What Kind of World?

Sermon for the Seventh Sunday of Easter, May 29, 2022

Readings: Acts 16:16-34; Revelation 22:12-14,16-17,20-21; John 17:20-26; Psalm 97

Sermon text: The one who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

In a moment we will baptize two young children, Olivia and Aaron. Babies—both less than a year old. New to this world.

What kind of world do we want for them to grow up in? Think for a moment. The kind of world in which they can feel safe, loved, able to grow into the people God made them to be, good, loving, creative, responsible, free.

What kind of world do we want for them, and what kind of world are we actually making?

You have heard the news, seen the faces. Uvalde, Buffalo, a church in California, a subway in New York, the country of Ukraine.

In community organizing we begin by noting there are two kinds of world, the world as it is, and the world as it should be. And the work is all about moving from one, closer, just a little closer, to the other.

Jesus tells the disciples that in the world as it should be, in the world ruled by love and the will of God, they will be one as Jesus and the Father are one, that all will be united in love and the will to do good.

In the world as it is, the world ruled by greed and force, Paul and Titus were arrested and beaten and then locked into stocks because they freed a slave woman from her oppressive owner and a demonic spirit that had possessed her.

So the question is, what can we do to move a little bit from the world as it is to the world as it should be? How do we make a better world for Olivia and Aaron?

Now you can't get to the world as it should be without starting with a true understanding of the world as it is. But unless you can imagine and really really want to work for a better world, nothing will change.

In the world as it is— or rather in America, and unlike every other country in the world— the leading cause of death of children is gun violence, about half by suicide. Car accidents and drug overdoses are numbers two and three. Thankfully, we have done well in reducing childhood diseases. In the world as it should be we need both to reduce the number of guns in the hands of young people—and here, we see that restrictions on alcohol to age 21 reduce the number of car fatalities, so that seems a reasonable step— and address the causes of depression and hate that lead to the willingness to kill oneself or others—and this of course will also address drug use. The challenge is that making changes involves both a cultural dynamic—hard to diagnose and address—and a policy problem, hard to resolve in the face of hardened political positions. What to do?

As a citizen, I have my opinions and a single vote—and I plan to exercise it. As a Christian, I have faith and hope. Faith in God and hope for the future. I have faith that Jesus, though ascended to heaven, has not left us without guidance and comfort—the Holy Spirit sent down at Pentecost. Faith assures us that in the end Jesus and God are triumphant—as we read in the book of Revelation. In the meantime we are sort of in the position of Paul and Silas, and the other people in the story. Caught in a hard place to get out of. What did they do?

They prayed and sang hymns, even in prison. You know who else did that? The civil rights marchers of the sixties. And look what they did—they moved the world as it was a little closer to the world as it should be, a world of equal rights and dignity for all people.

You can dismiss prayers and thoughts—enough of that, it is time for action! But action begins with thought, and prayer connects us to the power of God. Let us use that power. Look what happened in the prison, the earth shook, the chains fell off, the disciples went free. But they didn't just leave—they saved the soul of their jailer first. There is a lesson there. Faith and hope and love. They are strong forces, my friends, they are the power of God.

We learn their power in the stories of the Bible—and the truth of the sinful world also clearly presented. We learn from history that it is always been a

hard world—but progress is possible. We learn that greed and sin and outright evil are never once and for all defeated. We even know that sometime they appear triumphant. But we also learn that those who strived for justice and peace—and sometimes martyred in the process—are the ones we remember and hold up today. The ones we honor on Memorial Day. The ones we teach our children about.

I learned a story of a true hero this week—actually on the day before the tragedy in Uvalde. It has stuck with me. It is the story of a Polish man named Henryk Goldszmit, a Polish pediatrician who was known by his pen name Janusz Korczak. He was the author of children's novels and books on child raising. He directed a Jewish orphanage in Warsaw, of around 200 children, as a sort of republic—the children ran their own court, put on plays, printed a newspaper—and treated every child with dignity and respect. He had a popular radio show and a compilation of his writings, *Loving Every Child* is available in English in a 2007 edition. He considered emigrating to Palestine in 1938—but wouldn't leave the children. When Poland fell to the Nazis in 1939 all Jews were rounded up and forced into a walled ghetto. There, under starvation rations and constant threat he continued to fight for and feed and teach his children. Then the word came that they would be sent to the concentration camp at Treblinka—and by this time, August 1942, people knew what that meant. Korczak was offered a way out—papers, refuge—but again he refused to abandon his children. Instead he led them to the station. Eyewitnesses have left a description of the scene (which is also pictured in the 1990 movie *Korczak* by Academy-award winning director Andrzej Wajda) :

Janusz Korczak was marching, his head bent forward, holding the hand of a child, without a hat, a leather belt around his waist, and wearing high boots. A few nurses were followed by two hundred children, dressed in clean and meticulously cared for clothes, each carrying a blue knapsack and a favorite book or toy. As they were being carried to the altar. When the group of orphans finally reached the station, an SS officer recognized Korczak as the author of one of his favorite children's books and offered to help him escape. Korczak once again refused. He boarded the trains with the children and was never heard from again.

Legend has it that the car the children were in was uncoupled and the children got out and escaped to the mountains. The movie ends that way. The truth is buried in Treblinka. But the world as it is today is not the world

of Nazi rule and state sponsored genocide. Germany is far better today than in 1942. The Allied power defeated the fascists then. We remember many who died defending freedom this Memorial Day. Let us keep the faith in a future they died for. Let us continue the fight for a better world. the fight against evil, the fight for our children. Come, Lord Jesus, empower us by the Holy Spirit to bring your kingdom a little closer. Amen.

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