

**Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost A
Incarnation Lutheran Church**

WARNING AND PROMISE

1999 - COLUMBINE - 12 STUDENTS DEAD, 1 TEACHER DEAD

2007 - VIRGINIA TECH - 32 STUDENTS AND PROFESSORS DEAD

2009 - IMMIGRATION CENTER, NYC - 13 DEAD, 4 WOUNDED

2012 - AURORA, COLORADO - 12 DEAD, 70 INJURED

2012 - SANDY HOOK - 20 CHILDREN (AGES 6 AND 7) DEAD; 6

TEACHERS DEAD

JUNE 17, 2015 - MOTHER EMMANUEL AME CHURCH, CHARLESTON -

9 DEAD; SHOOTER - BAPTIZED AND CONFIRMED

LUTHERAN YOUNG MAN

2015 - SAN BERNADINO, CALIFORNIA - 14 DEAD, 22 INJURED

2016 - PULSE NIGHT CLUB, ORLANDO - 49 DEAD, 59 WOUNDED

2017 - LAS VEGAS - 59 DEAD, 517 WOUNDED

**IN HIS LETTER TO THE ROMAN CHURCH, PAUL, REFERING TO
THE SUFFERINGS OF HIS PRESENT WORLD, ASKS, "WHAT THEN ARE WE
TO SAY TO THESE THINGS? AND, INDEED, TODAY, WE ASK THE SAME
QUESTION. WHAT THEN ARE WE TO SAY TO THESE THINGS?**

**FOR SURE, EVERY TIME A MASS SHOOTING HAPPENS, VOICES
FROM ALL SIDES SURFACE TO ANSWER THAT QUESTION. THERE ARE**

THE PSYCHIATRISTS, THE POLICE, THE GUN LOBBYISTS, THE ANTI-GUN LOBBYISTS, THE NEWSCASTERS, REPUBLICANS, DEMOCRATS, INDEPENDENTS, CONSERVATIVES, LIBERALS - LOTS OF VOICES. AND, MORE OFTEN THAN NOT, WE LISTEN TO THOSE VOICES WITH WHOM WE AGREE AND TURN OFF THOSE VOICES WITH WHOM WE DISAGREE. BUT I WOULD SUGGEST TO YOU THIS MORNING THAT AS CHRISTIANS GATHERED TOGETHER AS THE BODY OF CHRIST ON THIS EARTH - AS THE CHURCH - IT IS THE VOICE OF GOD WHICH SHOULD BE THE ONE VOICE WE HEAR - THE ONE VOICE WE DO NOT IGNORE - AND THE ONE VOICE WE FOLLOW - WHETHER WE AGREE WITH WHAT GOD SPEAKS - OR NOT - BECAUSE IT'S NOT UP TO US TO DETERMINE WHAT IS GOOD AND UPRIGHT. THAT'S GOD'S JOB. IT IS UP TO US TO HEED AND DO WHAT GOD SAYS.

TODAY, IN OUR SCRIPTURE READINGS, WE HEAR WHAT GOD HAS TO SAY ABOUT THESE THINGS. SO, LET'S LISTEN. FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT PROPHET ISAIAH. THESE WORDS ARE OFTEN CALLED GOD'S LOVE SONG TO GOD'S PEOPLE - YET AT LEAST ONE SCHOLAR CALLS THEM A JURIDCAL PARABLE - A CALL TO JUSTICE WHICH CONTAINS WARNING AS WELL AS PROMISE.

WHEN THESE WORDS OF ISAIAH WERE WRITTEN, THE HEBREW NATION HAD ALREADY DIVIDED ITSELF INTO TWO KINGDOMS – THE NORTH AND THE SOUTH – ISRAEL AND JUDAH. THEY ARE AT WAR WITH ONE ANOTHER AND SIDING WITH WHATEVER PAGAN NATIONS SUPPORT THEIR CAUSE. BUT DEEPER THAN THAT, THEY HAVE STRAYED FROM THE LORD THEIR GOD – THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, ISAAC AND JACOB – THE GOD WHO BROUGHT THEM SAFELY FROM SLAVERY IN EGYPT INTO THE PROMISED LAND. AND TO THEM - TO BOTH KINGDOMS - ISAIAH SINGS GOD’S JURIDICAL LOVE SONG. HE SINGS OF GOD’S GIFT OF THE VINEYARD – SET ON A HILL, DUG AND CLEARED OF STONES BY GOD HIMSELF, WHO THEN PLANTED THE BEST OF VINES TO GROW THE BEST OF GRAPES, WHO BUILT A WATCHTOWER IN THE MIDST OF IT TO KEEP THE VINEYARD SAFE, WHO EVEN PROVIDED THE VAT TO HOLD THE FINEST OF WINES. AND THIS GOD, YOUR GOD, ISAIAH REMINDS THEM, YOUR GOD EXPECTED GOOD FRUIT BUT GOT NOTHING BUT “SOUR GRAPES.”

IN THE GOSPEL TEXT, JESUS BOTH BROADENS AND DEEPENS ISAIAH’S WORDS OF WARNING. SPEAKING TO THE CHIEF SCRIBES AND PHARISEES, HE CONTINUES HIS DESCRIPTION OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD – AND GOD’S INTENT AND DESIRE FOR THOSE WHO LIVE IN THAT

KINGDOM. THERE WAS A LANDOWNER, JESUS TELLS THEM, WHO PLANTED A VINEYARD, PUT A FENCE AROUND IT, DUG A WINEPRESS, BUILT A WATCHTOWER (SOUND FAMILIAR?) AND LEASED IT TO TENANTS. WHEN HARVEST TIME CAME, THE LANDOWNER SENT HIS SLAVES TO COLLECT THE PRODUCE. THE TENANTS KILLED THEM. HE SENT MORE SLAVES AND THE TENANTS KILLED THEM. AND FINALLY, HE SENDS HIS SON - TRUSTING THAT THE TENANTS WILL RESPECT HIS SON. BUT THEY KILL THE SON AS WELL.

A DEEPER LOOK AT BOTH THESE TEXTS GIVE US INSIGHT INTO THESE WORDS OF WARNING FROM GOD. AS WE READ A LITTLE FURTHER IN ISAIAH, (CHAPTERS 5-12), WE LEARN HOW GOD, INSTEAD OF FINDING THE GOOD FRUIT GOD EXPECTED OF GOD'S PEOPLE - THINGS LIKE - WORSHIPPING GOD AND GOD ALONE, OBEYING THE COMMANDMENTS OF GOD, LIVING IN HARMONY WITH ONE ANOTHER, WELCOMING THE STRANGER, CARING FOR THE POOR AMONG THEM, SEEKING JUSTICE FOR ALL - INSTEAD OF FINDING THAT GOOD FRUIT, HERE'S WHAT GOD FOUND:

- 1. THE ILLEGAL ACQUISITION OF LAND AND HOUSES TAKEN FROM THE POOR BY THE WEALTHY.**
- 2. DRUNKENESS.**

3. FAILURE TO HEED THE NEEDS OF THE POOR.

**4. IMPIOUS DEMANDS FOR DIVINE ACTION FOR SOME AT THE EXPENSE
OF OTHERS DEEMED BY THEM LESS SIGNIFICANT IN THE
KINGDOM.**

5. CONFUSION BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL.

**5. THE SUBVERSION OF JUSTICE FOR ALL – NOT JUST FOR THE SELECT
FEW BUT FOR ALL.**

**AND WHEN WE LOOK AT THE GOSPEL, THE MESSAGE IS
POWERFULLY CLEAR. WHEN GOD SENT GOD’S ONLY SON TO REDEEM
THE WORLD, TO BRING HUMANKIND AND ALL CREATION BACK INTO
THE RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD AS GOD INTENDED IN THE FIRST PLACE,
THE WORLD IGNORED HIS WARNINGS AND THE WORLD KILLED HIM.**

**SO, WHAT DO WE, IN THE MIDST OF THIS ONGOING INSANE
VIOLENCE IN OUR COUNTRY, WHAT, TODAY, DO WE HEAR GOD SAYING
TO US THROUGH THESE WORDS OF SCRIPTURE? DO WE HEAR THE
WORDS OF WARNING? WORDS OF WARNING TO US – THE CHURCH?
WORDS OF WARNING TO OUR COUNTRY? ARE OUR EARS AND HEARTS
OPEN ENOUGH TO NAME OUR OWN SOUR GRAPES AND TO REPENT, TO
TURN AROUND AND LET GOD RESTORE US? CAN WE BE OPEN ENOUGH
AND HONEST ENOUGH TO EXAMINE HOW IT IS THAT THROUGH OUR**

OWN ACTIONS – OR LACK THEREOF – WE, TOO, KILL GOD’S SON? CAN WE , FOR JUST A MOMENT, SET ASIDE OUR INDIVIDUAL POLITICAL LEANINGS, OUR OWN AGENDAS...CAN WE SET ASIDE ALL THOSE VOICES THAT SHAPE US AND LEAD US TO PRODUCE SOUR GRAPES – CAN WE , AS THE CHURCH, THE BODY OF CHRIST ON THIS EARTH, SET ALL THAT ASIDE AND LISTEN TO THE VOICE OF GOD AND LET THAT VOICE, AND NO OTHER, SHAPE BOTH OUR BELIEFS AND OUR ACTIONS? CAN WE? CAN WE HEAR THE VOICE OF GOD AND THEN CAN WE BE THE VOICE OF GOD IN THE MIDST OF ALL THIS INSANITY? CAN WE BE THE PEOPLE GOD IS CALLING US TO BE?

THE ANSWER, QUITE FRANKLY, IS “NO, WE CAN’T. NOT ON OUR OWN.” THAT’S WHAT THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL AND JUDAH HAD TO LEARN IN THEIR DAY. THAT’S WHAT THE CHIEF PRIESTS AND SCRIBES HAD TO LEARN IN THEIR DAY. THAT’S WHAT WE NEED TO LEARN IN OUR DAY. ON OUR OWN, WE CANNOT. ONLY WHEN WE OWN OUR SIN AND REPENT. ONLY WHEN WE LISTEN TO AND HEED THE VOICE OF GOD, ONLY WHEN WE PRAY FOR THE HOLY SPIRIT TO MOVE MIGHTILY AMONG US, ONLY WHEN WE REMEMBER WHO AND WHOSE WE ARE – ONLY THEN CAN WE HEAR GOD’S WORDS OF WARNING. AND ONLY

THEN CAN WE, EMPOWERED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT, BE GOD'S VOICE IN THIS INSANE WORLD. THE WARNINGS ARE CLEAR!

BUT THAT THEN BRINGS US BACK TO ST. PAUL – WHERE PAUL REMINDS US OF GOD'S WORDS OF PROMISE. “CAN ANYTHING SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF GOD?” PAUL ASKS. AND HE BOLDLY ANSWERS HIS OWN QUESTION. “NO! DEATH CAN'T, AND LOVE CAN'T. THE ANGELS CAN'T, AND THE DEMONS CAN'T. OUR FEARS FOR TODAY, OUR WORRIES ABOUT TOMORROW, AND EVEN THE POWERS OF HELL CANT KEEP GOD'S LOVE AWAY. WHETHER WE ARE HIGH ABOVE THE SKY OR IN THE DEEPEST OCEAN, NOTHING IN ALL CREATION WILL EVER BE ABLE TO SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF GOD THAT IS REVEALED IN CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD.” THE PROMISE IS EVEN CLEARER!

**AND SO WE HAVE WARNING...PROMISE!
BUT HERE'S THE THING. THE PROMISE DOES NOT NEGATE THE WARNING. AS BAPTIZED CHILDREN OF GOD, EMPOWERED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT, WE ARE CALLED, ENLIGHTENED, GATHERED AND SENT TO BE GOD'S VOICE – AND MORE SO – TO GIVE VOICE TO THOSE WHO HAVE NO VOICE, TO ACT FOR JUSTICE FOR THOSE WHO HAVE NO JUSTICE, TO SPEAK FOR PEACE WHEN THERE IS NO PEACE, TO LOVE**

**WITHOUT JUDGING, TO STAND UP FOR THOSE THINGS GOD COMMANDS
OF GOD'S PEOPLE: THINGS LIKE -**

- 1. YOU SHALL HAVE NO OTHER GODS.**
- 2. YOU SHALL NOT MAKE WRONGFUL USE OF THE NAME OF THE LORD
YOUR GOD.**
- 3. REMEMBER THE SABBATH DAY AND KEEP IT HOLY.**
- 4. HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER.**
- 5. YOU SHALL NOT MURDER.**
- 6. YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY.**
- 7. YOU SHALL NOT STEAL.**
- 8. YOU SHALL NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS AGAINST YOUR NEIGHBOR.**
- 9. YOU SHALL NOT COVET YOUR NEIGHBOR'S HOUSE.**
- 10. YOU SHALL NOT COVET YOUR NEIGHBOR'S SPOUSE, OR MALE OR
FEMALE SLAVE, OR OX, OR DONKEY, OR ANYTHING ELSE THAT
BELONGS TO YOUR NEIGHBOR.**

**AND SO, ON THIS DAY, AMIDST THE INSANITY IN OUR LAND, WE
PRAY - YOUR WILL - NOT THE WILL OF POLITICIANS - NOT THE WILL
OF THE MEDIA - NOT THE WILL OF THE CLOSED AND NARROW-MINDED
-NOT THE WILL OF THE REPUBLICANS - NOT THE WILL OF THE
DEMOCRATS - NOT MY WILL - NOT THE WILL OF ANYTHING, GOD,**

**OTHER THAN YOUR WILL - THIS DAY WE PRAY - YOUR WILL BE DONE,
O GOD. YOUR WILL BE DONE. AMEN.**