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Episcopal Church of the Incarnation, Santa Rosa, CA

March 28, 2021

Palm Sunday, Year B, Revised Common Lectionary

[Mark 11:1-11](#)

[Isaiah 50:4-9a](#)

[Psalm 31:9-16](#)

[Philippians 2:5-11](#)

[Mark 14:1-15:47](#)

May the same mind be in us that was in Christ Jesus, who humbled himself and became obedient even to death, even to the death of the cross.

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There's something people say after horrible things happen. Things like the shootings in Atlanta last week or Boulder this week. They say, "I can't believe this happened here." Or they say "This is not who we are."

It's well-intentioned, even though of course it's not true. The point is exactly that this did happen here, and this is who we are, at least part of who we are. Gun violence is part of who we are as a society. Violence against women and minorities is part of who we are as a society. Tragedy and injustice and hatred happen here, just like they do in every place. But when people say these things I sometimes imagine them as aspirational statements. "If only this couldn't have happened here." "Would that this weren't who we are."

We wish we could carve out a space that's free of all that. Here in America; or here in Sonoma County; or here in our family; or here in the Episcopal Church; whatever our "here" is. A place that's kind and fair and safe. And of course some places and some environments are more so than others. But the truth is we can't create that reality in a little bubble of our own making. What we long for is the reign of God. And short of God's reign, we live in a world where tragedy and suffering and just plain evil are always at hand.

Jesus was tried and sentenced and crucified in a place not too different from ours. A place where political and religious leaders made compromises, sometimes out of fear, sometimes out of practicality, that sent a good man to his death. A place where people whose job was to do violence on the state's behalf coped by engaging in casual cruelty to prisoners they could imagine as less than human. A place where bystanders found themselves caught up in the morbid fascination of public spectacle.

When I was in college my university held an academic conference that included an exhibition of a set of postcards from the American South in the first half of the twentieth century. They were postcards of lynchings. And the exhibition was carefully curated and crafted in as respectful a way as possible, to bring home the horror of the subject matter while trying not to be exploitative. But the photos were meant for recreational consumption, bought and sold as souvenirs, most of them showing crowds grinning and mugging for the camera, happy to be there, unashamed, drawn by the spectacle of horror and scapegoating and the reinforcement of a racial hierarchy in the bodies of its victims. Yes, this can happen here; this can be who we are. And it could happen in first-century Jerusalem. And it has been happening in ways big and small all through the ages.

God is not surprised by our cruelty. God is not surprised by violence or tragedy or miscarriage of justice. God knows the full depth of human sin. God knows it from the inside. “Though Christ Jesus was in the form of God, was equal with God, he made himself of no reputation, took the form of a slave, and being found in human form, became obedient even to death—even to the death of the cross.”

Therefore God has also highly exalted him, writes Paul. And there is our hope. For if he has been raised up, he will not leave the rest of us behind. Not on the gallows; not in the ICU; not in the strangely silent house or the empty bed. In him all the tragedies and all the evils of our lives are seen, and known, and tenderly held. And in him we will be redeemed, and raised.