

Sermon for 4th Sunday after Easter, April 21, 2013

John 10:22-30

Blessings to you and **peace** from God the Father, our **risen** Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and the **Holy** Spirit. Amen

Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia.

This has certainly been **quite** a week for our country has it not? On Monday there were the **tragic bombings** in Boston where a number of people were either injured, maimed, or killed. Then on Wednesday there was the **devastating** explosion in West, Texas which nearly **leveled** the town of 2,100 killing or injuring hundreds of people, and then on a more **personal** note on Thursday morning a good friend of mine's **37 year old** daughter was taken home from UCI medical center in Orange County. This young woman is **Eryn** Martyn, the daughter of **Pastor Rich** and Barbara Martyn of **First** Lutheran Church in Fullerton, and the **sister** of your former pastor, Josh Martyn. She went home to be on hospice as there is **nothing more** the doctors can do for her **advanced** stage of liver cancer and the tumors which are **consuming** her body. It has certainly been quite a week for sadness and tragedy that is for sure.

Dear God—help us.....

After I heard about the bombings in Boston on Monday I was in my car. I turned on a local **Christian** radio station hoping to hear some words of **comfort**, some **inspirational** Christian music, and **praying** that something that would **lift** my spirits. But **instead** what I heard was the radio person ask a question which **infuriated me** to the point of turning **off** my radio all together. He asked, “Why would God let a thing like this happen?” *That was IT!!!!* **Why would God let a thing like this thing happen???**

I would like to tell you a **little** something about me which is a **basis** for my life. I tell you this because I have **experienced** it first hand. My **belief** in God and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ tells me that when events such as these happen our God is **right here** with us in our **grief and suffering**. Our God is **not** distant. I believe our God is here in the **midst** of us. If I could be so bold as to give God our **human** attributes I believe God **feels our pain** right along with us.

My theology also tells me that God does **not cause** these events or tragedies to happen because if that were so **where else** could we turn for help and consolation at times such as these? I feel the **root cause** of these acts of violence is our **sinfulness**, our **fallen** humanity, and a **demonstration** of just how far we as a people have **separated** ourselves from the **perfection** that God had planned for us.

The ones who **perpetrate** these acts, in their **fallen** sinful selves, are the ones who are to blame—**not** God.

But please also know that, on the **other** hand, when I was working with **hospice** and as a **chaplain** there were **many** times when I did have to **confess** to a family that there is **no explanation** for some of the events that happen in this world. I do **not suppose** to speak for any of you but I **do not believe** that the God we **pray** to, the God who **loves** us so much, the God who **walks** with us in our pain and sorrow, the God who is our **refuge and strength** in times of trouble would ever **impose** tragedies like any of these to happen to **anyone** we know or love or to happen to **anyone** of His beloved children. Speaking for myself, but I just **cannot** and **will not** believe that. If I did/if we did **all hope** would be gone. Where would the **Good News** of the gospel of Jesus Christ lie if that were the case?

I read a statement the other night. It said, “*You must not lose faith in humanity. Humanity is an ocean; if a few drops of the ocean are dirty: the whole ocean does not become dirty.*” This was written by Gandhi.

Dear God—help us to see you and to know your truth.....

In **some** of the reports from Boston at the time of those blasts **many** people who were there in the nearby crowd that day **did not run** away to keep themselves

safe. They ran **toward** the victims to see what they could do to **help**. In Texas, at the explosion, at least **10** of the people who died were **first responders**-*five* were volunteer fire fighters, *four* were emergency responders, and one was an *off-duty fire fighter* from Dallas who lived in West. As for Eryn, **cards and prayers** have been coming to her from all over the country. Through the power of **social media** many people she may **not even know** are praying for her.

Dear God—help us to see you and to know your truth in the depths of our sorrow and despair.

On this Good Shepherd Sunday **not only** did we read our 3 readings, in which **God's glory was revealed**, but we also read the **beloved** 23rd Psalm which is the psalm of the day **each year** on this Sunday. The **Good Shepherd**—because of him we **want for nothing**, because of him we **lie down** in green pastures, because of him our **souls are restored** in times of need and suffering, because of him even when things look their darkest **he is with us**, because of him **goodness and mercy** will follow us all the days of our lives, and because of him we will **dwell** in the house of the Lord forever. Is it **any wonder** that this psalm above **all** others is the one which gives us **comfort** in our time of **need**, **comfort** in our time of **grief**, and **comfort** in our time of **despair**?

Contained in our **gospel** reading for today we heard Jesus telling the Jews gathered around him that the **reason** they did not know him is that they **did not** believe and **because** of their unbelief they **did not belong** to his sheepfold. As **believers** in God and Jesus Christ we **know** His voice, He **knows** us, and we **follow** Him. The truth is **because** of our **knowing**-our **hearing**-and our **following**-we will have **eternal** life and **no one/nothing**—not some **crazy** bombers, not some **random** explosion, not some **awful disease** like cancer—can **snatch** us out of Jesus' loving arms.

Folks, to me this **does not sound like** a God who has **abandoned** us or has “**allowed**” these tragedies to happen in our world and in our lives. We have a God who **loves** us and wants to keep us **safe** from harm. That is what I **HAVE TO BELIEVE IN**—how about you? Otherwise **where** is our hope? What **else** can we hold on to when the **chaos** of the world is **falling down** around us and is **too much** for us to bear? I can think of **NOTHING** that this world has to offer us that can give us this **blessed assurance** even in the midst of tragedy that is for sure!!!

This is what I **pray** for for all of us—that we Christians **cling** to God and Jesus Christ when **tragedy** strikes our country, when **sadness** fills our lives, when we feel that there is **nowhere else** for us to turn, and when we are **called** to face **whatever** challenges this world puts in our path no matter what our age.

*Dear God—help us to see you and to know your truth in the depths of our
sorrow and despair. To know your presence, to know that we can turn to you.
We give you thanks for being our all loving, all grace filled, and all merciful
Father in heaven. AMEN.*