

This has been an unsettling week...

Gracious God, May these words be your words of grace. Amen

This has been an unsettling week. This has been the kind of week that makes us stop and think about how unpredictable and fragile life is. The Boston bombing that killed 4 and injured so many left us shaken. We want to know who if there were others involved, why, and if it might happen again. On that same day, there was a bombing in Somalia where over 50 were killed. Many in our world live with bombings on a regular basis. Each time folk cry out asking why ...torn to the core. It is a time of lamenting and tears.

A teacher at Hollis Brookline Middle School faced her children on Tuesday, not knowing what to say. She had recently talked them through the Sandy Hook Killing, answering a lot of questions and dealing with difficult feelings. What was she going to say? Instead of talking, she had children trace their feet (making footprints) and writing messages of peace on those footprints. Some of the messages were for those hurt or killed at the marathon. Others wrote more general messages of peace. The children got so carried away with it, that before the end of the day, the whole school became involved....They wanted to make a path around the school and they named it – Pathway to Peace. In this time and place, what would our messages of peace say? What would our pathway of peace look like?

The book of Revelation was written at a time when the Christian community was suffering under a reign of tremendous violence. The Roman Empire was brutal. Caesar was thought of not only as King, but as God. It was thought of blasphemy to defy him. John's message in Revelation reflected the reality of their suffering. At the same time of their suffering, a new reality was breaking through – one that is deeper and wider than any could imagine. Through their tears John gave them a vision of hope.

In this passage in Revelation, I prayed over and stretched this scripture this week. I love the image of people from all nations – people from the Americas, joined with people of Africa, and joined with the Middle East and eastern European countries....Asia and Iceland – all as one. They are one people around the throne of God. People celebrating and singing – claiming God as the ultimate power in their lives. Even in the midst of the scars they celebrate God. AND the lamb of God – Jesus - becomes their shepherd, guiding them. He has known the pain of violence and death. He now leads them in life. And he guides the thirsty to water. And God will wipe away every tear.

What does this scripture tell us as it leads down a pathway of peace?

1. We want God to protect us from suffering. BUT, suffering, vulnerability and pain are a reality in our lives. We can't avoid it. . But God gives us gifts to sooth the fire within us...: people who are agents of healing; (running towards the bombing and not away, to help people); and God gives us the power to not let one event define us. Paul Simon in his CD, "Surprise" shares with us a song, "Wartime Prayers" – "Times are hard/Hard times/The thing is, what are you going to do/Try

- to muscle through? But when the wounds are deep enough, and it's all we can bear, we wrap ourselves in prayer.”
2. God calls us to a deeper realm than the one we live in. In that realm there are different rules. The rules we live in our present realm are: “Get before you are gotten.” “The one with the most toys wins.” But, God’s laws are, “Love your neighbor”, “Love your enemies”, “Forgive, forgive, and forgive”. Wow, that is hard. It seems like an affront and appalling. How is it possible to love someone who has blown the legs off of someone you love, or killed your child? It takes a lot of prayers. It takes dipping ourselves deeply into the water of God’s grace...it takes trusting that God always cradles the ones we love and even the ones we don’t.
  3. God’s realm is in contrast to the realm of violence. It is a realm of peace. We have to address the problem of escalating violence in our world. It wants to blame it on video games and the media, especially after this week. I want to blame it on guns. I want to blame it on our culture of violence.... and will not let each of these off the hook and I don’t think violence comes out of a deep place of brokenness. The brokenness is so strong, that God’s peace is blurred. We are broken, our society’s broken. We can’t seem to find our way out. But then there is resurrection. God’s love is so powerful that it can lift us up and put us back together.

You see, in God’s realm, we come together to heal. And that is what we as the church are about. We are here not just to sit back and appreciate that we are good people. We are here to do the hard work of healing. AND to really heal, we need Jesus. Jesus as our shepherd will lead us. Jesus as our guide will show us a new path.

Bishop Gene Robinson spoke on Thursday night. He said something like this – Jesus doesn’t need any more admirers. Jesus has plenty of people who think he is just grand. But what Jesus needs are disciples.... disciples who follow him bravely, knowing that they might never see God’s kingdom fulfilled on earth. BUT they are faithful because they know their footprints of faith, will lead to other footprints of peace....which will eventually make a pathway – Where All Gather; All Nations, as One Celebrating God.