

Sermon 122814 Fairness
Scripture- Matthew 2: 1-25
Sermon Title- "Life is not Fair"

I'd like to start by telling you a story that is not factual but it is true. Susanna and Daniel were young, married and the parents of a small child, a boy. It was around 2000 years ago in a small town south of Jerusalem. The child was named David because the town, Bethlehem, was known as the 'city of David.' David had just learned to walk and was putting sentences together in funny and strange ways. His high-lilting voice had a musical tilt to it that delighted his parents.

Late one night while everyone was sleeping, the king's soldiers surrounded the village, and at first light they came into town. The soldiers made all the parents with boys under two years old to bring the boys to the town square then soldiers checked the village for anyone who didn't comply. Once they were satisfied that the boys under two were all there, without a word they killed them. After the soldiers left and the horror had receded enough, they counted 21 children killed.

Susanna and Daniel eventually put together a semblance of life and did their best to go on. They even found new meaning in synagogue worship. Until one night when they discovered that on the crucial night before the baby boys were slaughtered an angel from God had come to warn one family to flee. The angel

instructed Joseph to flee with Mary and the baby Jesus to Egypt. Jesus was alive and well, but not their little Davey.

This story, as I mentioned, is not factual but it is true. The characters and the specifics were made up. But we know that what is now called ‘the slaughter of the innocents’ in Matthew’s Gospel happened. There were likely many Susannas, Daniels, and Davids. Imbedded in the Bible story is a verse from the Hebrew Bible book, Jeremiah, that reads, “A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.” This quote, often called, Rachel’s Cry, fits very well in this horrible story.

Now it is a horrible story but at the same time it is a wonderful miracle story. The soldiers are working on orders from King Herod to kill Jesus. They fail to find Jesus because an angel forewarned his family. Thank God. Of course, the Roman Empire failed that time but succeeded in killing Jesus around 33 years later. That’s the good news.

The bad news of the story is obvious. Innocent children died because cruel King Herod ordered it. The story does beg some questions. The birth of Jesus resulted in innocent deaths. The angel saved him. Why did the others have to die? Why would the information be given to one family and not the others? The story is not alone in raising life’s unfairness for the faithful. The story of

the healing of the blind man is wonderful, unless heard from the perspective of all those blind persons in the world who were not healed.

So here we are the first Sunday after Christmas and not even a week past and the harsh reality of the life of our Savior hits us. The decorations still up and fresh and already innocent children are being slaughtered. So we have in our lives the often-harsh world pushing in on us with the latest reports of mass killings in various parts of the world including our own country. I was just a few weeks ago that the Taliban killed 140 school children in Pakistan. It's been two years since the mass killings in Newtown, CT. Anyone think this was a Merry Christmas there?

The world is not fair. In some of the earlier Hebrew Bible writings, particularly the Prophets, it was believed that the virtuous would prosper and the wicked suffer. It became increasingly clear, however, that all too often the exact opposite is the case. The wicked prosper and the innocent suffer. That's the way it is, my friends.

There were Herods before Herod and there have been Herods since Herod. We all can name some but nowhere near all. There are natural disasters, acts of violence like September 11, 2001. There these insane mass shootings at malls and wherever. Is it fair to happen to be there at that moment? There's prejudice and

cruelty all around us. There is unfairness in the workplace, in the schools, on the playground, and in the church. There are children born to prosperity and children born to poverty. There are birth defects and car crashes. There are untimely deaths and lives that go beyond what we call ‘the quality of life.’ Has there ever been a war that does not have what is euphemistically called ‘collateral damage?’ A lot of the world doesn’t add up or make any sense.

One thing is true. It doesn’t appear that the world will be suddenly becoming fair anytime soon. It is an unfair and often times cruel world. But it is, my friends, the only world we’ve got.

How then should we respond to this unfair world? Well, we can start by being fair ourselves. Because we live in an unfair world is no reason to be unfair ourselves. In fact, we need to be fair *because* we live in an unfair world. Part of what Jesus teaches us is to be ‘other directed.’ That is to think of others before thinking of ourselves. The Greatest Commandment is to love God and neighbor. Being fair minded toward others is part of that call. But being fair is not enough.

A few months ago I did something very unusual for me. I called into a radio talk show. It was the mid-day show on WGBH, one of the public broadcasting networks in the area. The hosts asked the question, “How do you cope with a world that seems to be going to hell in a hand basket? We learn of the ebola breakout,

environmental problems, we don't trust politicians and they don't trust each other. People are afraid to send their kids to school because they are afraid the schools may not be safe and on and on.

Some people called in and said they have stopped looking at the news. One guy called in and actually said that he copes by using a lot of drugs and alcohol. I'd had enough so I called in and said that I don't deny or disagree with any of the negative things that they listed. I then said that I cope by looking at the world with two eyes.

With one eye I see the sick and fetid world but with the other eye I see that simultaneously it is a beautiful world. There is beauty in every day. There is kindness and compassion everywhere you look. There is courage and heroism taking place somewhere every moment of every day. We can all be thankful for all the blessings we have in our lives.

Well, as it turned out, I was the last caller in the segment. They thanked me profusely for the call and talking them off the ledge. They even said they wanted me to come on the show, which I laughed off.

What I didn't say on the radio but I will say to you is that, yes the world is not fair, but we've got so much more. We've got our Lord. We've got our savior who is there for us. Jesus said, "Come to me all who are weary and burdened and I will give you

rest.” (MT 11: 28) Jesus teaches us to be the medicine, the corrective for an unfair and often cruel world. The world desperately needs love, compassion, kindness, forgiveness, and trustworthiness. Jesus calls upon us to provide just that to this needy world. Is this easy? Not always. But we have the ability to make this world more fair and livable. We have ability to bring light into the darkness. Let us answer the call of our Lord. AMEN