

Sermon 011418 Despair
Scripture John 1: 1-16
Sermon Title Surviving the Storm

I have reached a point, and I know I'm not alone in this, that I hate the news. The problem is, we can't avoid it. You go on line and the first thing that pops up is the breaking news. Cable news stations are cranking 24/7. Somehow the latest news pops up on my phone. The news we get is not just bad, it's horrific.

I'm old enough to remember the Civil Rights movement, the Vietnam War, and Watergate. The political atmosphere today is worse, much worse than then. People on opposite ends of the political spectrum these days do not say, 'We are right and they are wrong.' Today the attitude is that, 'we are the good ones and they are evil, or heartless, or stupid.'

Rancor is pervasive in politics today. I'll promise you that someone is hearing (or reading) this and thinking, 'it's the other side's fault.' Think of this, in the last presidential election, both final candidates had far more people who hated them than liked them. Meanwhile moderates have been largely silenced. It is not just politics.

The 'me too' movement has turned a page in American life and history. If you don't know what the 'me too' movement is, it is people, mostly women, who have come forward to recount the unwanted sexual advances, all the way up to rape, that have been done to them

by men who had some degree of power over them. Because women were stigmatized in the past when they brought these things forward, it took courage. The famous men who lost their positions in light of these accusations are only the tip of the iceberg. The not famous men in the workplace and in families have been getting away with this for, God knows, how long. I think we all need to take a personal inventory of our own lives and behavior.

More bad news is around race relations in this country. Yes, the lot of people of color was improved by the civil rights act and the voting rights law. But that did not change people's hearts. Racial prejudice is still rampant in this country, and somehow it seems to be more visible these days. After the last election vandalism against synagogues and mosques increased as well as hate crimes.

News of terrorism in our country and around the world is tough to process. It gives us a sense of not being safe anywhere. That is what terrorism is designed to do. It puts fear in people, and you just can't think clearly when you are in the grips of fear.

Then there are the mass shootings. As stunning and heartbreaking as each one when we hear it on the news, they continue. Natural disasters have become more frequent and more horrific. That is just the national news feeds.

Have you watched the local news? We get a daily dose of domestic violence, hit and runs, missing children and on and on. It is no wonder why so many people like me move to the sports section so quickly. Even there, we are not safe.

Look, I have been a NE Patriots fan since they started in 1960. I have already decided that I will walk away from football when this amazing run ends. The Pats won't let me leave now, but I will. The concussions, violence, reports of players and domestic violence and the like is taking the fun out of being a fan.

The news is a torrent of stuff that is becoming increasingly difficult to absorb. I said this earlier, but I know it's not just me. I have spoken to people in this church, colleagues, family, and friends and we are all in the same boat. Short of going off the grid and opening a food truck in Pago Pago, what do we do?

When I was writing this sermon, I got to the last phrase, what do we do, and I broke for lunch. It was so upsetting to review all the things I just talked about, I made lunch, went into You Tube and clicked on Steve Martin doing standup comedy. He had me laughing very quickly.

But really, in the face of the storm of bad news, how do we remain positive? How do we find peace in our hearts and souls? How do we get along?

Now, it would be easy for me to just say, come to church and pray. Have a nice day. I'll get to that, but there is more. I've been reading a book called, 'The Wisest One In The Room.' In it, the authors point out that wise people refuse to judge people. Rather than judge someone as bad, or heartless, or stupid who you might disagree with politically, to have the wisdom to think that others might just have legitimate reasons for their views. It is what my mother used to call, 'giving them the benefit of the doubt.' I might also open the door for people to start listening to each other, something that used to happen.

When we hear of terrorism and mass shootings, it will help to remember that you have less of a chance of being a victim of one of those than be hit by lightning. Unfortunately, we have similar odds of hitting the lottery. People who perpetrate such acts have hate in their hearts. We should also remember the helpers, those that go beyond themselves to help others in times of crisis. They give us hope.

Yes, there is a lot of hate in this world. The truth is that you cannot answer hate with hate. The only answer to hate is love. Each and every one of us can answer the hate in our world by ourselves being loving people. We can best answer all of the rancor around us by being loving and kind people. We can disagree without being disagreeable. We may be the last best chance for our country.

That is where the church of Jesus Christ comes in. Jesus doesn't teach us how to be financially successful or politically powerful. He teaches how to treat others.

He teaches us to love, to be compassionate, to forgive, to help the needy, and to be agents of reconciliation. We do those things as a lifestyle and a world that seems so troubled gets a little bit better.

You want peace in your heart? Pray. You cannot be in prayer and feel hatred or anger. You want to have a positive attitude? Just look around you. Look at all the good people that you know. People who are friendly, kindly, and are trying to do the right things. You want to feel good about yourself? Do some charitable work. You will see that you will get more out of your compassion than the person you are helping. No matter how bad the news gets, goodness is to be experienced all around us.

When this sermon was percolating in me, I spent time contemplating grace. God's grace is not earned, it is bestowed to we who don't deserve it, for we are all sinners. No, grace is given to us freely. It is up to us to decide what we are going to do with it. Do we choose to join in on the ugliness of an often hateful world or do we let God's grace shine through us to a world that desperately needs it. We show gratefulness for God's grace by living God's grace. We do that by loving truth, beauty, justice, and kindness.

The final line of the passage, Desiderata reads, “with all its sham drudgery and broken dreams, it is still a beautiful world.” So it is.

AMEN