

Good News

Job 14:1-6

Last Sunday, a gunman walked into a church and started shooting. At the time that I am writing this, 26 had died. What a horrific event! Why did it happen? Some will inevitably blame it all on guns. Others will try to find some way to link it to Islamic terrorism. President Trump called it a “mental health problem at the highest level.”

We do not like death. We do all that we can to avoid death. We do not like it when people kill one another. We value life! We see life as a precious gift, and so it is. It is a gift of God. It is to be treasured and cherished.

How many will decry the senseless slaughter, the taking of human life, the ugliness of it? Yet many of those who will scream the loudest to get rid of guns because they kill, will be the same ones who will speak out the loudest to protect the people who destroy human life in the womb?

Death is not pleasant! It is not what the Lord of life desires for us. So why is there death? It is a sin problem! If there were no sinfulness, there would be no death! All of creation is corrupted because of sin, and as we learn in Romans, “all (men) have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Rom. 3:23)

If you read the text from Job again, you will find that the words which begin our text are words that you have heard before, maybe as you read the book of Job, or you heard them every 3rd Last Sunday of the Church Year, or maybe you remember them from the graveside committal service of someone being laid to rest. “Man who is born of a woman is few of days and full of trouble. He comes out like a flower and withers; he flees like a shadow and continues not.” It is foreordained that death is the very lot in life for all those living, it will happen.

To our ears though, Job’s words sound fatalistic. At some level, we really do not want to hear them. Why? Because, to some degree or another, you and I fear death. We do not like it when it happens to others, and we certainly do not want it to happen to us. And fear of death is on the minds of many.

What, you don’t believe me? If you meet someone you know, often the greeting is to ask them how they are doing, “How are you?” How many times have the responses that you hear prove exactly my point? You know the replies that I am talking about?

“At least it is another day above ground.”

“At least the dirt is under my feet.”

“I got out of the bed this morning.”

The number of responses that show people are glad to be alive are numerous.

Listen again to the entire text from Job. “Man who is born of a woman is few of days and full of trouble. He comes out like a flower and withers; he flees like a shadow and continues not. And do you open your eyes on such a one and bring me into judgment with you? Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? There is not one. Since his days are determined, and the number of

his months is with you, and you have appointed his limits that he cannot pass, look away from him and leave him alone, that he may enjoy, like a hired hand, his day.”

Job knows sinfulness. Job knows that man will die. So, he is begging that man be allowed to enjoy his life before it is over. Who would not agree with him! Who here cannot resonate with Job’s sentiment? Life is difficult enough without other tragedies that crop up. How many people think similar things that echo Job’s words?

But let us examine them. “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?” he stated. In other words, “men are sinful from their very hearts, we should not expect anything holy, righteous, and clean to come out of them – at least according to their flesh.”

We saw evidence of that truth in the events at First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs, Texas. With the shooter dead, we may never know ‘why’ he did it. But we can say with all certainty that it was because of sinfulness, we just do not know the specifics of the reasoning in him for what he did.

However, in the midst of tragedy in the lives of believers, even in the midst of death, there is Good News. The world may not like it, and certainly does not understand it, but it is nevertheless true. In fact, many sitting here today may not like to hear the truth.

God answers prayer. Job’s prayer was answered on a hill called Golgotha years later. Job was not brought into judgment, just as he asked of God! Judgment for Job was laid upon Christ, and Christ suffered that judgment upon the cross. In that event, God does bring clean out of unclean, faith in God, trust in Christ, was brought out of Job, for he confessed, “As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the earth. “Even after my skin is destroyed, yet from my flesh I shall see God; whom I myself shall behold, and whom my eyes will see and not another.”

In these verses, God, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, gives Job to know his eternal place in God’s kingdom, confessing the resurrection of his body on the last day. You and I know this too, for we know that on the third day, Christ was raised from the dead. We also know that we too will be raised, for numerous places in the Scriptures we are told such is the case.

So, how do we face such tragedies as last Sunday? Even some Christians have asked, “Where was God?” Some unbelievers made fun of prayer after that Sunday shooting, even claiming that it obviously did no good to pray.

So, let me ask you a question. Who would be comfortable with me saying that those who were killed, were in being killed, having their prayers answered?

Rev. Hans Fiene, an LCMS pastor wrote a great article for “The Federalist” on Monday (11/6/2017). Let me preface his words with a simply question. What do you pray in the Lord’s Prayer? “Deliver us from evil.”

With that portion of the Lord’s Prayer in mind, Pastor Fiene wrote: *Millions of Christians throughout the world pray these words every Sunday morning. When we pray these words, we*

are certainly praying that God would deliver us from evil temporally—that is, in this earthly life. Through these words, we are asking God to send his holy angels to guard us from those who would seek to destroy us with knives and bombs and bullets. It may seem, on the surface, that God was refusing to give such protection to his Texan children. But we are also praying that God would deliver us from evil eternally. Through these same words, we are asking God to deliver us out of this evil world and into his heavenly glory, where no violence, persecution, cruelty, or hatred will ever afflict us again.

We also pray in the Lord's Prayer that God's will be done. Sometimes, his will is done by allowing temporal evil to be the means through which he delivers us from eternal evil. Despite the best (or, more accurately, the worst) intentions of the wicked against his children, God hoists them on their own petard by using their wickedness to give those children his victory, even as the wicked often mock the prayers of their prey.

During Christ's crucifixion, for example, the same chief priests, scribes, and elders who conspired to put Jesus to death mocked him, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, 'I am the Son of God'"

Yet God proved his son's divinity by, three days later, lifting him up out of the death those men gave him. Despite the chief priests, elders, and scribes doing all they could to silence the one who claimed to be the savior of the world, God turned their hatred into the catalyst of the world's salvation.

Dear friends in Christ, Pastor Fiene is absolutely correct. This is how God brings a clean thing out of unclean. It was out of the most despicable evil, out of the innocent suffering and death of His beloved Son, God purchased forgiveness for all. God delivered you from evil, by the very evil intended by those who were the architects of Christ's crucifixion. God used that event for the salvation of sinners.

Those believers killed on Sunday, though the act was evil, were delivered out of any other evil of this life and ushered into the glories of heaven where there is no evil for all eternity. Yes, those who remain will grieve, they will experience the pain of their loss. But as our epistle said, believers do not grieve as those who have no hope, for we know that one day, we will be reunited to enjoy the eternal bliss of God's kingdom.

Now, today, in Word and Sacrament, Christ comes to feed and nourish us so that we may enjoy, like a hired hand, our days. Yes, each and every day is full of toil. We must work each day, but there is joy and satisfaction in the task. We have the opportunity each day to use the talents and the abilities God has bestowed upon us to the help and benefit of our neighbor. At the conclusion of each day, we can give thanks to our God for the blessings we have received from Him, all though the hands of our neighbors. And, we can go to bed knowing that indeed, His Holy angel is with us, and the evil foe has no power over us – eternally.

We can pray with all boldness: Deal with us Lord, in your beloved Son Jesus Christ, not by what our own flesh has merited, but according to your mercy. You have determined for us our days, let us live them in peace, knowing that we are your beloved children, you have cleansed us in the blood of the Lamb and made us clean. As we await His return, grant us patience and the peace which passes all understanding which is ours in Your beloved Son. Amen.