



TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH

on the Branford Green

May you find Christ, Community and Compassion within these historic walls.

What do we do now?

By The Rev. Sharon Gracen

December 16, 2012

In the church calendar, this is meant to be a kind of refreshment Sunday, a break from the somber tone of the Advent lessons. We lit the pink candle to symbolize joy, but today we can barely remember what that feels like. We are all painfully living a different story than the one we heard today, from the Gospel of Matthew,

“When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

“A voice is heard in Ramah,
weeping and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children
and refusing to be comforted,
because they are no more.”

...the story of slaughter of the innocents and the weeping of Rachel, for her children who are no more. Twenty children are no more and we all weep. Friday night, late, Peter and I walked down to the water. The air was so still and there was barely any movement from the water. It was as if all of creation was holding its breath, afraid of what it knew. There is no sense in asking “why”, because there is no answer to that question, or maybe there are too many answers. The only question of any value today, as we heard over and over in the Gospel is “what?”

What are we to do? First of all, I believe that we need to take a hard look at ourselves and the culture we live in. Last May, the world lost a great and wise man, Walter Wink. He was a theologian and writer who worked for peace and reconciliation throughout the world. His seminal work was a series of books known as the Powers. He tackled the idea of the powers and principalities that hold sway in the world and draw us from the love of God. He coined a most useful term - “the myth of redemptive violence.” the belief that enough violence, successfully applied, will keep us safe. He claims this is a myth, because every time the supposedly ultimate weapon is created, it is made obsolete by another more lethal one. No weapon will make us safe. Every security system can be foiled. No safety measures can prevent a committed wrong doer from doing damage. And yet, we still believe that weapons and security systems will neutralize what threatens us. We hope that weapons will take away our vulnerability.

1100 Main Street, Branford, CT 06405

www.trinitybranford.org

203-488-2681

e-mail rector47@trinitybranford.org



TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH

on the Branford Green

May you find Christ, Community and Compassion within these historic walls.

Dr. Wink was a creative proponent of non-violence, and he found his inspiration in the teachings of Jesus, and in particular passage from the Gospel of Matthew “if someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn and offer them the left.” Here is the back story, you’ve heard me tell this before, but it bears repeating today. In the world of Jesus’ time, there were two ways to hit someone; one is a manly sock to the jaw and the other is a dismissive backhand slap. This latter one was reserved for inferiors - slaves, women, and children. But it was also used by the Romans against all Jews, even venerated community leaders. So Jesus told his people “don’t let anyone treat you like a slave, turn the other cheek to them and make them hit you like an equal without using violence against them.” Jesus said, don’t meet violence with violence but instead expose it as the bullying that it is, absorb it, deflect it and deprive it of its power. If there is nothing to push back at, the violence loses its strength. This was how Gandhi and Martin Luther King successfully mobilized people to confront the powers and principalities of their times. Non-violence won. Any victory achieved by violence is not lasting. Any peace achieved by violent means is fleeting.

The American story in recent years has been trying to convince us that more guns will make us safe. This is the myth that Walter Wink unraveled for us. We have allowed ourselves to be bullied by lobbying efforts that have increased exponentially the number and type of weapons available while claiming that it’s about rights and that we need such automatic weapons to make us safe.

At the same time, we have invited unspeakable violence into homes in things that pass for entertainment. Movies and video games are not evil in themselves. But we cannot be so naïve as to think that there is no damage done when young people and adults immerse themselves for hours on end with fantasy realms involving repeated mass killings. These games tell you that you have to kill to get to the next level and to be invulnerable. And then someone will say that it’s just a game and it doesn’t really affect people. After all, look at all of the people who play them who don’t hurt anyone. Please!

This is our culture, accepting the myth of redemptive violence and denying the effects of the tools and images of violence in our midst. Most of us have been passive silent witnesses as our culture has been hijacked and Jesus’ message of non-violence and love has been drowned out. Well, it is time to do something about that. If the sacrifice of these children does not motivate us to change, then we are doomed.

It is time for someone to step up and begin showing the rest of the country what it looks like for a community to say no to violence, in any form. It is time for a community to show the world what it looks like to embrace Jesus’ way of non-violent living. It will not be easy and it will involve sacrifice. It will require each and every one of us to examine our lives and purge them of the tools, accoutrements, and symbols of violence. It will mean some sort of declaration and commitment to a new way of life. It will mean recognizing things like violent video games and guns as a part of the sickness. It will mean shunning violent entertainment. It will mean standing up for these ideas and sharing them with those we know and love and becoming evangelists of a new way.

1100 Main Street, Branford, CT 06405

www.trinitybranford.org

203-488-2681

e-mail rector47@trinitybranford.org



TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH

on the Branford Green

May you find Christ, Community and Compassion within these historic walls.

The one problem with Advent is that we keep hearing that a savior is coming and so we wait for someone to show up and fix us. It's time for us to trust that in Christ and each other we have already been given what we need to create the community of love that Jesus envisioned. Our job is to undo evil and fear with love so that God's kingdom can emerge from the ashes and pain of places like Sandy Hook and Newtown.

I don't know exactly what this will look like but I know that I'm going to step into this breach and stand for a different kind of world that doesn't buy the myth of violence and doesn't react to tragedy with fear or more violence. I hope that you will join me. We will be given all of the strength and courage that we need. There are 20 children and 6 martyred teachers who are counting on us.

1100 Main Street, Branford, CT 06405

www.trinitybranford.org

203-488-2681

e-mail rector47@trinitybranford.org