

Sermon

There is a darkness in this world. A powerful force that seeks to undo all that is under the Light. A darkness that has crept into every facet of our lives. A darkness that is part of each and every one of us. It'll show its face in many different ways. Sometimes hatred or disdain, sometimes through deep seated jealousy or fear. It comes out through abuse, harassment, violence, bullying, destruction, and death. Now, I'm sure that if I asked each one of you if you have experienced this darkness or have engaged with this darkness at some point in your lives, each one of us would say yes. It is a part of life and as humans, we are not perfect. We succumb to the darker side of humanity at times. Sometimes we have no choice but to come face to face with this darkness.

This week was one of those times. I'm sure many if not all of you have seen and heard about the carnage that occurred in Uvalde, TX this past week. 19 children and 2 teachers were killed with dozens more physically injured by this domestic terrorist. Countless more are bearing the emotional and psychological pain from this attack. I don't know about all of you, but I was glued to the updates coming out from Uvalde. Each one seemed worse than the last and with each piece of news coming out, my heart plummeted more and more. I felt myself becoming numb by the violence, terrified for my own children, and falling deeper and deeper into despair over the state and fate of humanity.

And yet. all week I heard - This was your fault, no this wouldn't have happened if xyz, these people don't want to help you, only we have the answers...does all of this sound familiar? Not only do we hear this time and time again when atrocities are committed. We also heard this last week in my sermon. This is how we worship, no, this way, etc. It was just a mass of divisiveness, brutality, and darkness.

So with all of this as a backdrop, we come to the scripture reading for today. The scriptures today show us a snapshot of Jesus' final meeting with his disciples, moments before Jesus was betrayed. A time when I am sure he was beginning to feel some despair and the inevitability of his death, he is praying to God that all of the disciples, all those who follow him, and everyone really, *were as one*, just as God is as one with all of us.

Jesus knew that in the darkest times, when the people would be at their most vulnerable, it was important...vital to come together to be as one. He

repeats this many times throughout the prayer. I believe Jesus knew that the act of betrayal coming shortly after this meeting could cause fissures and factions within his followers. These acts of darkness would do *then* exactly what they do to our world today. Divide and isolate us. Turn us against one another. Separate all that is the body of God in this world.

And to be perfectly honest, I could feel the pull of that darkness this past week. I read the scriptures and I struggled with what to say and how to use them in this space. With everything weighing on my heart, the destruction in TX, the discord across the country, the invasion of Ukraine, and the memory of all those who gave their lives for this country with Memorial Day tomorrow...how can I possibly speak of coming together as one? The idea of One in this country and world was long past gone. The idea of being One was destroyed.

I was sitting with this for some time. Struggling with this. Then I began to hear some voices throughout this week saying over and over that only God can fix this mess, only God can “save” our country, only God, only God. Initially I pushed back on this, typically the rhetoric in which this is stated isn’t in line with my theology or ideology. I’ll get into that in just a little bit. However, it did get me thinking back to the word from last week. God within us. The Divine within us. When we focus on God within us, as One with us, just as Jesus did in his time of trial, when darkness was right at his door, it is then that I can begin to imagine all of us coming together and being as One. It is then that our differences will not separate us. We will be as one, one community, one people, each with our own differences, our own beliefs and identities, united in a mosaic of all that is humanity.

Now, of course, this begs the question – How? It’s great to just say it. Half the people I heard say “Only God” over the course of this week though said it half-heartedly. As if just uttering the words would bring about systemic change within our country. Now, it’s not my belief that a simple statement can suddenly bring about this change. What do we do then? How do we *use* the Divine within us to bring people together and create this concept of one community? How do we use the Divine within us to bring about the systemic changes that are desperately needed in our country?

I’ll try to answer this with a small example of what I tried this week. I reached out to my Soldiers this week after hearing about the attack in Uvalde. I shared with them this short poem:

When little hearts stop,
Time collapses.
The world pauses
It's perpetual spin.
Grief takes control
With inescapable claws.
Madness ensues,
When little hearts stop.

I encouraged them, during times of grief or turmoil or division, to be the hearts that do not stop. Words may not always hold power over this darkness but *love in action* can conquer all tides. **Love in action.** Now one of the things I love about Army chaplaincy is that we operate in a pluralistic environment. There are different faiths, cultures, backgrounds, etc. Very much like society today. We, as chaplains, are called to bring the Divine, to bring the spiritual world into this space. Yet we also have to do this in a manner that invites *everyone* into this space. And the way I try to go about doing that is through Love in action. By embodying that Divine which is in me and spreading it to all that I come across.

The Chaplain Corps puts some different language around it. Calling our 3 competencies, our three main tasks, to Nurture the Living, Care for the Wounded, and Honor the Fallen. When I imagine what Jesus was hoping for when he prayed that we be as one, I imagine *all people* following these three paths. Just as we do within the chaplaincy, without caring what the others' beliefs are, who they voted for, what they look like, how they identify, or who they love. Our job, as people of faith, as people who have the Divine within us, is to go out and act in love. Help to build up those around us, encourage them, support them. Go out and provide comfort to those who are in despair, provide some spiritual peace to those who have gone through trauma. Because trauma and grief are not selective. They do not touch upon only one group of people. They touch all of our lives at one point or another. And I believe without a doubt, we do more to bring about the Realm of God and a community of One by putting aside differences and living out our Divine mandate than we ever would by preaching who is right and who is wrong. We come together as One and are One when we nurture those around us, and care for those who are hurting.

Finally, we come to one of the most impactful parts of our mission of embodying the Spirit within us, of acting in love. Honor the Fallen. Memorial Day is tomorrow. A day when we take time to remember and honor all of the military service members who have given their lives for this country. Service members who paid the ultimate sacrifice in the pursuit to rid this world of the evil holding it captive. Whose efforts throughout history have brought us closer together as a country and a world. I pray that you find time in your day tomorrow to reflect on their efforts. Reflect on the grief of this day. The pain that is felt across the country as service members, families, and friends grieve the loss of their loved ones.

I also pray that you take some time to reflect on how we can honor those service members. It is my belief that one of the best ways to honor those who have died is to continue their mission, to live in ways that would not undue all they had done. We honor our fallen service members, we honor all those who have been killed by hateful ideologies, by the darkness in this world, by spreading *our love in this life*. By sharing the Divine within us at every encounter. By breaking down barriers, crossing lines others refuse to cross. We honor the fallen each and every time we work to make sure no one is consumed by the darkness again.

All of this, nurture the living, care for the wounded, and honor the fallen, is done through Love in action. To be one with God, to be one community, to be a mosaic of the best in humanity, takes action. Deliberate, unyielding action. Action done with the love, the peace, and the grace of God. Amen.