

Y'all, I am tired of waking up wondering what terrible news happened overnight. I'm tired of living in a country I didn't grow up in. I'm tired of what sure looks like meanness for the sake of new and exciting kinds of meanness. I'm tired, but I'm not done. I know that the Church gets most of y'all for an hour, maybe two each week. Some of y'all, we get more of, some a little less. That's all good. And I know that, of that hour or two, I get about 10 to 15 minutes, depending on how quickly I want to get finished and head over to Coffee Hour. Christianity is a big thing. What I mean is that there is no way every single sermon or any preacher, for that matter, can encapsulate the entirety of what it means to be Christian every week. This medium is meant to take our scripture, tradition, or reason, and tie it to our lives. As the application for my position said, "we want someone who preaches with one eye on the text and one eye on the news." So, I do a kind of spiritual triage when I write my sermons, looking for what part of Christianity I can shine a light on this week in a way that's real and evocative and, hopefully, compelling. Back when I told more stories, the world was a good bit calmer. I could preach about my grandma's biscuit recipe or teach y'all the proper use of "y'all" because evil wasn't flaunted in our faces with every move of the people in power. Can you imagine a "consider the lilies" kind of sermon right now? It's not that we shouldn't consider lillies, it's just that, no offense to lilies, we've got bigger spiritual fish to fry.

Now, with that said, one of the things I'm learning and learning to love is just how important it is for every member of our community, every part of this body to pitch in however we can. Maybe you don't love hearing the news in sermons, but you can still feed God's sheep. Maybe you're working more hours than you're at home and your kids need to take priority; that's okay, you can still teach them about justice. Maybe you can't leave the house; you can still pray. And while we can't rely solely on prayer to fix all this, prayer matters. And if praying is all you can do, then by God, pray. If gardening is your thing, maybe considering lilies matters more than I gave it credit. Think of the joy a blossom brings to those walking by. Even if they don't register it, you've put a little beauty in their lives that wasn't there before.

More and more, I'm appreciating what it means to do this work together, but to know what we're working for, we need to know what we're working against. I expect y'all to be praying. I expect y'all to be learning about scripture, whatever that means to you. I expect y'all to love your neighbors and work for their dignity not because we're trying to get on God's good side but because we have faith, and our faith turns our eyes to those who come to us by day or by night. In other words, I expect y'all to be doing the basics. I take that for granted. Which is why I'm digging into this stuff so deeply. Because it isn't the basics. We've all got a lot to learn real fast to get this community as strong as we can. Pray. Knit hats and socks. Bake cookies, plant something, make plans, look ahead with kindness and faith and the stubborn hope that says, no matter what happens today, when the dawn comes, look to the east, for there the sun will rise.

But as the sun rises, we have got to face the reality of the world we're living in, the world we're praying for, the world we're trying to change. If you don't know already, I'm sorry to be the one to tell you that, teaming up with Israel, we've bombed Iran. Now, I'm not saying Iran was in a good situation before this, but we belong to a religion that actively, fundamentally promotes peace. In that bombing, we hit an elementary school and killed at least 50 little girls. For what it's worth, this is the 12th country we've bombed in the last 13 months. There's Venezuela, and again, they weren't in a good situation, but a foreign nation invading just to get rid of your leader? Imagine if someone did that to us? Or just randomly bombed our boats out of the water? There's Cuba. My Lord, we've deployed an old fashioned siege with the blockade starving out the entire nation. If

you'll notice in all these, there's a pattern here. There may be legitimate targets, but y'all, the disregard for collateral damage, assuming it is in fact collateral, is astounding.

Meanwhile, Kansas negated trans people's drivers' licenses overnight. There was no grace period, no grandfathering in. They went to bed with proper ID; they woke up without it. So now they have to go to a government building (an increasingly frightening proposition), pay for the pleasure to get a new license with the incorrect gender, and risk imprisonment for driving to the government building with an invalid ID. ICE is still in Minneapolis, in spite of what you may've heard to the contrary. They regularly entrap potential detainees by preying on their kindness. There's stories and videos of them entering businesses and pretending to need help with a flat tire, or asking someone to come out and move their car, or posing as police searching for a lost child, or even, still, using children as bait. The Ancient City of Raffah has been bulldozed. Students across the United States are afraid to go to school and those who do make it there try to learn in an increasingly restrained education system hemmed in by the fear of the dual serial violences targeting them: being shot by their classmates or being kidnapped by their government. Teachers describe students worried about saying goodbye to their parents at dropoff lines 'cause it might be the last time they'll get to say goodbye; they sprint from bus stops to get inside as fast as possible; they skip class to sneak into the bathroom to call their parents at work in the middle of the day just to see if they've gotten taken yet. That's what I'm tired of waking up to. And I'm tired of feeling like I need to tell y'all about it, but when evil runs so rampant, it's kind of a priest's job to make sure you see it, too. I'm tired, but I'm not done. I know y'all are tired, too, but something tells me you're not done, either.

Now, there's one quick thing from our scriptures we still need to talk about, and that's Israel. I can't say it clearly enough or enough times. Israel is not the same as Judaism or the Jewish people. And critiquing Israel is not the same thing as critiquing Judaism or the Jewish people. Critiquing Israel, the nation state in the 21st Century, is not the same as antisemitism. In the same way, critiquing the US is not the same as antichristianity, and in the same way, critiquing Iran is not the same as critiquing Islam. Though the players sure seem to be spiritually at odds, this is not a Holy War, if such a thing can exist. This is not Judaism vs. Christianity vs. Islam. These are immature boys with destructive toys and a total disregard for national sovereignty and human life. And the rest of us are at their mercy.

Paul says we're all descendents of Abraham, "the father of many nations." And we are. Christianity comes out of Judaism, and though Paul doesn't know he won't be remembered as Jewish yet, that's how this plays out. But Islam is, too, a descendant of Abraham. Abraham had a son, Ishmael, who God promised to make into a great nation, too. God made what would become Islam spiritual descendents in that moment, "For Abraham is the father of us all." In other words, these are both our siblings, and we share so much. Both Genesis and that Psalm remind us that Israel is favored by God. God favors Israel, favors all of Abraham's spiritual descendants. But did you catch in Genesis why God promises all these people to Abraham? "I will make of you a great nation," God said, "so that you will be a blessing." So that you will be a blessing. Now, I know there's more to modern geopolitics than "what did God tell Abraham?" I know that, but also, can you imagine how different the Middle East would be, how different this planet would be if our leaders came at every decision with at least the attempt to be a blessing? How different would we be? There in the evening light, Jesus told Nicodemus that new life would come from above. Would that our leaders cared before dropping death from above instead.

In all this horror and fear and shock, there's a piece we're still missing. You see, God has a habit of taking tools of destruction and making them into something new. When Moses led the people into the wilderness, in their wanderings, they ended up in a place full of venomous snakes. Moses made a little snake statue, and everyone who looked at it was cured! It sounds kinda silly when I say it that way, but that's the basic

story. God took something deadly and remade it as an instrument of healing and hope. History may not repeat but it certainly echoes, and when we get around to Good Friday and Easter, we'll see another something deadly, the cross, become an instrument of healing and hope. Bishop Carrie Schofield-Broadbent, our former Canon to the Ordinary, when she was consecrated down in Maryland, they gave her a pectoral cross, those big crosses only bishops wear, they gave her a pectoral cross -- the visible sign of her episcopate -- they gave her a pectoral cross made from the melted metal of a gun, the modern equivalent of hammering a sword into a plow. Healing and hope.

I don't know what'll happen on distant shores, but I know this. God has a habit of taking what's broken and making it not just better but sometimes a symbol of healing and hope. After the news this weekend, I don't know what that would look like. A drone? A missile? A button? I don't know what it will be, but I trust, somehow, that what's been broken will be remade, and that life can come from the heavens, and that eventually, we're all going to figure out how to be a blessing. I am tired, but I am not done.