

Before I get started, I want you to know that I wrote this before the news about Iran came out. I think it still applies, though, so here goes.

I'm a little extra worried this week. For those of you who grew up with chipper "duck and cover" cartoons insisting that a classroom desk provides sufficient protection from a bomb hotter than the sun, this is a worry that may be familiar, but I didn't live through that fear. By the time I came around, I was taught the awful power of the bomb, taught never to let the bomb happen, taught that disarmament was the way to the future, promised that the horror of its strength was its own deterrent. From the movies I watched growing up, the bomb was just there to knock asteroids off course or deter Martian invaders. I've never had to worry about the bomb for humanity's sake, but now with warheads waiting in the wings, now I do worry. I'm concerned, to say the least, that as the conflict between Israel and Iran continues, I've got very little confidence in the primary leaders involved. Israel, Iran, Russia, China, and us -- I don't trust any of those leaders to have their fingers on the button. One of 'em would drop the bomb out of vindictiveness, another out of glee, and another 'cause anyone who disagrees is an antisemite.

A quick side bar: Opposing the actions of the government of Israel is not necessarily antisemitism. Hating the Jewish people because they are Jewish, that's antisemitism. Hating the atrocities committed by any government is not. Saying things like "Israeli tanks shouldn't fire on Gazan aid stations," for example, isn't antisemitic, it's humane. The Jewish people are not the same thing as the Israeli government, just like we're not the same thing as the American government. It's just not the same, and pretending it is weakens the actual definition of antisemitism, puts Jewish people worldwide at greater risk, and gives a nuclear power free reign. Don't fall for it, folks.

Anyway, I'm worried. I'm worried that, for some supposedly justifiable reason, conversations in backrooms are laying the groundwork for the most extraordinary destruction of humanity imaginable. I'm worried that cartoon villains are beginning to look tame. I'm worried that, every morning, I feel the need to check the news before getting out of bed to see if this is the day the modern Icarus will bring the sun to the earth to slaughter millions. And I'm worried that any sermon written before Sunday'll already be obsolete thanks to the delayed arrival of a new horror.

I'm worried, which is why I'm so grateful to have people like you and a faith like ours close at hand. Take a look at that Elijah and Jezebel story. Jezebel arranged for the assassination of all God's prophets, but Elijah survived. All was lost. Elijah was certain things'd never get better. But God spoke, and angels nurtured, and Elijah regained his strength to travel and speak and fight back. Elijah was all that remained, home and people and influence were gone, but God was not. Even when all appears lost, if you are all that remains then all is not lost. If you remain, so does hope. If any of us still draws breath, we'll follow where God leads, even to the lair of evil itself. Evil never expects the broken to rise. Now, the story of Legion's a little different. Actual demons confront Jesus, beg him not to banish them back to the torments of Hell, and Jesus obliges. He doesn't respond with vengeance. He responds with mercy, and he sets them free. The locals are so terrified by his power -- and maybe by his mercy -- that they run him out of town. Even when it's right, it's not always popular to act like Jesus. In both those stories, the majority insists on discrimination to the point of lethality. Whether it's the direct danger of a prophet sticking around to see his religion fall or the threat of even the messiah sticking around long enough to find out what happens to the merciful after sundown, it's not always popular following God. But popular isn't what we're here for. Popular is easy. Prophetic is not.

I'm confident that there is no situation in which dropping the bomb is justifiable. I know the arguments for those dropped on Japan. They're bogus. The bomb indiscriminately slaughters millions in a haunting fashion. "Thou shalt not kill" still applies, but we've gotten here again because one extremist misuse of religion combats another extremist misuse of religion while yet another extremist misuse of religion cheers to the detriment of all of humanity. Should the propaganda machines convince enough that the time is right for the bomb, St. Thomas', be prepared to be in the minority. In many ways, we already are. Episcopalians make up roughly 1% of the American population. As part of Christianity, we're in the majority, but we've grown so far from the dominant Nationalist Christianity (or they've grown so far from Christ) that within our own family, we're on the margin largely because we promote the traditional Christian values of peace, hope, and love. It's getting less and less popular to talk about those ideals. But y'all, since I gave that speech on the Village Green a week ago, I'm here to tell you that while peace, hope, and love aren't common these days, they're desperately needed. I didn't say anything all that extraordinary. I talked about peace, hope, and love, and every day since I've been approached by people I've never met saying just how much they needed to hear that message. And it's a simple message: the world is broken, yes, but that doesn't mean it will stay broken. We have the fortitude to imagine peace, hope, and love winning out, and we have the spiritual vigor to make it so. That's the message this world's missing but desperately needs. People are starving for it.

Like Elijah, if any one of us still draws breath, we'll follow where God leads. Evil never expects the broken, the loving, the peaceful to rise. Fear of the bomb or Gilead or whatever worries you into doomscrolling, fear may proliferate but it will not win. Fear will not win, the bomb will not win, evil will not win because we won't let it. Being faithful is not the same as being popular. It takes a special kind of strength to stand for unpopular, complete with faithful peace, faithful hope, faithful love. And that's a strength rooted in a loving God and in each other and in faith. May our mercy be so great it frightens the vindictive. May our hearts be so open they unsettle the cruel. May our hands be so diligent they overturn the unjust. May our souls be so hopeful they hound the destroyers. And may our future rest not in the power of a star, but in the love of the Son.