

ST. JOHN'S AT DIOCESAN CENTER IGLESIA EPISCOPAL DE SAN JUAN

23 E. Airy Street | Norristown PA 19401 | (610) 272-4092



COME, HOLY SPIRIT, COME!

The Rev. Andrew F. Kline

Text preached the Sixth Sunday after Easter

May 29, 2022

ACTS 16:9-15 | PSALM 64

REVELATION 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21 | JOHN 17:20-26

This morning, there is no way to escape that we are mourning the slaughter of the innocents, and fighting for the lives of our children. In the space of two weeks our nation has been rocked by not one, but two mass shootings at public schools. In Buffalo, New York, the shooter was seemingly motivated by the basest kind of racism, a primitive tribal animus, and traveled miles to kill children with a different color of skin. In Uvalde, Texas, we are witnessing a failure of all our attempts to keep our children safe. An insufficiently funded mental health system failed, our first responders failed, but most especially our politicians pretend they can do nothing. We don't trust each other. The social contract is broken. We are broken. The devil smiles. He tempts us each to think that the only solution is to go out and get our own gun.

I have no more desire to preach a political sermon than you want to hear one. But is our only choice to feel empty and helplessness or turn a blind eye? Don't we see more clearly now that young men of a certain age, socially isolated, drinking in poisonous ideologies online, are drowning, able to buy guns, and killing children. Don't we see that certain politicians refuse to enact policies that would demand what the constitution requires - a well regulated militia. Don't we see that if a society is not worthy or capable of being responsible in the exercising the right to bear arms, then it should lose that right. It's time to take the driver's licenses away for a while, enact some red flag laws, universal gun and ammunition registration, higher age limits for purchasing assault weapons, and for heaven's sake, getting some of these guns off the streets. See it: this only happens in America.

I bother to say all this because there are things that can be done. And having said that, I want to make a hard right turn and suggest that we don't see what we need to see, because the battle we face is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities and the powers of this world and spiritual forces of evil in heavenly realms.

This is symbolic language from St. Paul, who is the hero of our story this morning from the book of Acts. This language gives us a third eye, an ability to ask questions in love, of not immediately blaming each other before we struggle to trust each other. If there is a spiritual source to our trouble, then thoughts and prayers continue to make a difference.

When the apostle Paul traveled with Silas to Philippi, he was introducing the good news of God in Christ to a non-jewish culture for the first time. Gentiles had been coming to faith before, but either living in Israel, or connected to Jews in other places. In Philippi, after meeting Lydia, being taken into her home, almost by accident, Paul comes to the attention of the whole city. Out of annoyance with a slave girl, who is herself employed by the principalities and the powers of both the state and the priests of Delphi, who is strangely following after Paul, badgering him with the truth, he delivers her from the Python spirit, the spirit of divination at the heart of Greek culture of the time. She was, more or less, an astrologer, paid to tell peoples fortunes, and gifted enough to make other people a lot of money. She comes to Christ, and welcomes Paul into her home.

The principalities and the powers are not happy about the loss of their income. They have Paul thrown in prison. And quite literally, Paul is released from prison through the power of prayer and worship. And because Paul knows that the only way he can upend the current order is to surprise it, he stays in prison, free in every way, until he can free the rest who are there, especially the jailor, who is justifiably concerned about receiving a negative job review. “What must I do to be saved?” the jailor asks. “Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” And the picture of salvation is of baptism and the celebration of communion after.

This is the perfect story for this final Sunday of Easter, which is also the Sunday where we celebrate Christ Ascension to the right hand of God.

Easter is the time when we search the Scriptures and go over the many and ancient promises of God, and see them fresh in the new light of the resurrection. Remember how Jesus tried to tell his disciples that the Messiah must suffer and die, and they would not grasp it until after he rose from the dead. Remember how Jesus tried to tell them that he would have to go away from them in order for him to come in a way that would make him present to all believers forever. Remember how Jesus has told us that he is preparing a place for us, and yet will return, to live with us, so that we will be where he is.

All these profound but somewhat complicated truths are summed up in the picture of the Ascension. Jesus rises from the dead, appears for forty days proving he is alive, then ascends bodily to the highest place, at the right hand of God, in order to fill all things, bring together the divided and separated levels of creation, and perfect it by sending the gift of the Holy Spirit. From heaven to earth, from earth to the cross, from the cross to the grave, from the grave to the sky. But the sky is not a place apart. It is the dimension, the center, that unites all levels of reality, the visible and the invisible.

Jesus ascends and is even now, our great high priest, interceding to God for each one of us. He is filling the creation with new thoughts, new cries for healing and justice. Here is what I am trying to think when I hear someone say to those who are suffering the loss their children, the loss of their innocence. For centuries, to be a child

was to be in hell. Infant mortality, infant slavery, poverty, war and famine, all added up to the reality that most children did not survive this cruel world.

On the last night of his life, Jesus prayed for us. He prayed that we would be one, as he and the Father are one. He gave us our mission together as a church, to restore people to unity with God and each other in Him. He is coming again to be our judge. In the meantime, “Come Holy Spirit.”

Every time we pray for the Holy Spirit to draw near, to rest upon us, to come to us, we are praying that prayer of the ascended Christ. We are asking for him to enlighten us, to move us, activate the gifts he has given us to heal the world, to set slaves free from economic exploration, to set free captives in every prison of this world’s making, to find some measure of justice and comfort for those who mourn the loss of their children.

Come, Holy Spirit, Come!