

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

I need to start today by naming something essential to our walk as Christians. You probably noticed that when I read the Gospel moments ago, I changed the words “the Jews” to “the authorities” – so the sentence read: *When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for the fear of **the authorities**, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.”*

This is a change that I – and many other clergy – make in recognition of the ways in which our sacred texts have historically, and continue to be, used to fuel anti-Semitism and hate.

Today we grieve yet another mass shooting. Yesterday, six months to the day after the Tree of Life massacre in Pittsburg, and on the last day of Passover and during Shabbat services, a white supremacist opened fire on Congregation Chabad in Poway, CA – killing one and injuring three.

It appears the man responsible for the shooting posted a manifesto online shortly before the attack, filled with anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim screeds, and modeled after the terrorist who murdered fifty people in the mosque attacks in Christchurch, New Zealand last month.

In it, he specifically blamed Jews for the death of Jesus, and used that as a motivation for his violence yesterday.

Folks, this is not a new problem.

Some of you read the article I posted to our Facebook page during Holy Week about why Good Friday was dangerous for Jews in the Middle Ages and how that began to change after World War 2 and the Holocaust due to strong leadership from Christian leaders across denominations, who realized that their own teachings and practices had contributed to the Nazi genocide against the Jewish people.¹ I encourage you to read it if you haven't yet.

And yet, in part due to translation issues with scripture, in part due to religious leaders who don't do historical critical text studies, and in part due to the fact that white supremacy is our legacy – and so much more – the issue of Jews being labeled “Christ killers” as a justification for violence against them is still very much alive.

Folks, this is OUR problem as Christians. And we need to own it and do the work it takes to root out the evil that has taken hold of the Gospel message of God's unconditional love.

This begins with naming the problem and not looking away from it because it makes us feel uncomfortable (you've heard me preach on that problem before). It means every year I publish that “disclaimer” in our Good Friday bulletin about how the Passion reading in the Gospel of John specifically has been used historically to justify violence against Jewish people. It means today I changed one word in our Gospel. And it means that we must speak up about this, not just in our prayers another wave of violence – but in our conversations and our very lives, holding ourselves and others accountable for speech and action that dehumanizes and sets some groups of people aside as “other” from “us.”

Because here's the thing: Jesus was Jewish. Our Savior, the one we proclaim as Lord, lived and died as a Jew.

¹ <https://theconversation.com/why-good-friday-was-dangerous-for-jews-in-the-middle-ages-and-how-that-changed-114896>

The Gospels accounts we read were written 30-60+ years after Jesus' death, and their language setting up opposition to "the Jews" is a reflection of what was going on in the lives of those communities of followers who distilling a new identity and were becoming the early Church.

Part of that process was that they were breaking away from, and sometimes being pushed out, of Synagogues as they truly became something new. As their identity as followers of the Way of Christ solidified, their relationship with their Jewish brothers and sisters became at times antagonistic.

It's not unlike what has happened in churches today when communities fracture over various issues of identity and belief. In fact, I know many of you remember with pain those members who chose to leave this community when the Episcopal Church upheld the dignity of LGBTQ folks and consecrated Bishop Eugene Robinson.

What we read in the Gospels, and in the Book of Acts, about "the Jews" being responsible for Jesus' death reflects this type of conflict and community disintegration.

But let's be clear, "the Jews" did not have state power in Jesus' day –the Romans did. And he died not because he was challenging the status quo of Jewish faith, but because the Romans saw him as a threat to their law and order. And the punishment for that was state execution.

It was the Roman authorities that the disciples were afraid of on that evening of the first day of the week, with the door locked to that upper room.

Remember that Mary Magdalene and the other women had proclaimed the resurrection to them that morning. And so whether they doubted and believed it to be an idle tale, or they just didn't know what to do with this news – there they were locked away in fear that what happened to their friend and leader could happen to them.

And that's where Jesus met them. He met them where they were and gave them his peace – his shalom.

Shalom – the Hebrew word meaning peace, harmony, wholeness, completeness, prosperity, welfare, and tranquility.

In their fear and grieving, Jesus met them where they were and gave them his peace.

This is our takeaway this week, right now. That Jesus meets us where we are and give us peace – shalom that is food for the journey, so that we may more closely walk in his footsteps, proclaiming God's peace in our day.

That in doing so we will sow love and not hate, hope and not fear. That his name will not be a weapon we wield, but a balm we spread far and wide to help heal the wounds inflicted by those who have perverted the love and peace of God for hate and power.

There is a balm in Gilead to heal the sin sick soul – and it is God's shalom.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God – that we may be healers and doers of the Word, transforming the world with God's help.

~ Amen ~