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Binkley Baptist Church
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Mark 14:32-42

Thoughts and Prayers, Jesus

They fell asleep. Peter, James, and John, our transfiguration trio couldn't stay awake on a silent prayer retreat with Jesus. Not just any ole retreat but a dark-night-of-the-soul, prayer meetin' time in the hollow of an olive grove retreat. Gethsemane (oil press), where Jesus agonizes over his future and has his spirit pressed for what to do with his life at a critical moment.

Mark describes the scene at Gethsemane, an episode just after Jesus has predicted that everyone will desert the cause. Not surprisingly Simon Peter overestimates his abilities and tells Jesus that even if all the others fall away, he won't. Jesus, who had no difficulty being direct responds with a hard truth, "Peter, you will not only forsake me but you'll actually deny me three times before the rooster crows." To which Peter, who flunked Self-Knowledge 101, says, "even though I must die with you, I will not deny you." And off they go to Gethsemane.

You know that the Gospels are remembered reflections, not contemporaneous travelogues. The fact that the disciples tell on themselves and show how they missed the mark is revealing. Here's Peter, the unnamed source behind Mark's Gospel, telling on himself.

That's where Mark takes his readers, on the heels of the predicted falling away of the followers, to a place to pray with Jesus, and Peter, James, and John. It is not insignificant that it's the same three who accompanied him on the mount of transfiguration just a few weeks back you'll recall. Theological time-travel was much more appealing to them then (Moses and Elijah showed up remember?) than now. Distressed, agitated, deeply grieved, all words describe Jesus' emotional state in the garden. Jesus asks them to "watch and keep awake," as he prays. Three times, count 'em, three, they let him down. Could you not keep awake for one hour? Heavy eyes. No excuses except tiredness. And at the end of the episode, an exasperated Jesus screams, ENOUGH. An appropriate word at this time in our nation's life and as part of this weekend of activities at churches all around the globe. Haven't you ever stepped into a critical moment and discovered either fatigue or drowsiness from others causing you in exasperation to yell ENOUGH!

It's as if their sleepy slumber was a "thoughts and prayers, Jesus" moment. Knowing a moment and not getting it, not wanting to get involved, not understanding what Jesus really needed from them. Sleepy. They all fall asleep, three times over, leaving Jesus angry and frustrated at them and dreading his arrest that follows. When you care deeply about something important and others don't seem to step into those moments with you, it feels like loss.

Edwin Dahlberg, the great American Baptist peace and justice Pastor and ecumenical leader, from Colgate-Rochester Seminary in New York, once reminisced about his professor, the great Walter Rauschenbusch who gave us the social gospel. Dahlberg said that one day he had an early morning theology class with Rauschenbusch; all students were surprised he had showed up, seems he had been very involved in a bond issue for the city of Rochester to secure money for the building of a water system and better sanitation to parts of the city that still lacked running water, no plumbing, poor sanitation, outdoor toilets, disease. He worked and worked and worked on the bond issue, to get the folks to care about such a thing.

He came to class, early in the morning, the night after the vote. He started his lecture and got into it, but after three or four minutes laid his lecture notes to the side, opened the newspaper and held up the banner headline to the students, "BOND ISSUE DEFEATED." He then put his head on the desk and began to cry. Why were so many asleep? It's an awful thing to care so deeply about a cause and try to get others to care as well, but so often they don't. We don't. It's agony. It's the dull ache of death.

Margaret Farley, a Catholic feminist theologian, has written on the various interpretations of the passion of the Christ----from the popular version of a God who exacts payment, who sends a son to death seemingly unnecessary in order to satisfy a requirement that is both arbitrary and cruel. Or sentimentalizing the suffering of Jesus, of being overwhelmed by it in a way that prevents our seeing how it reaches to our own day and calls us both to share in it and to alleviate it.

Farley believes that the cross of Jesus signifies the suffering of all human persons----that burden that Jesus identified with and took upon himself, so Christians are called to stand in solidarity with all those who suffer across time and space. And while the cross signifies every form of suffering (sickness, tragedy, aging, etc.), there are certain kinds of suffering that are central to its meaning, namely, suffering that is the consequence of injustice. The kind of suffering that does not have to be; that cries out for an end not in death but in change.

Yesterday in Raleigh, Durham, D.C., all around the country marchers said that enough is enough, and that it's time to put an end to gun violence in our country, and that it's time to make our schools safe, and it's time to make easy gun access a thing of the past. I'm going to stand with young people all over the country who are sick and tired of being afraid. I'm going to stand with young people who do not understand why it is still so easy to buy an assault weapon in our country. This morning we commemorated Jesus' entry into Jerusalem waving palm branches and remember how much courage it took for people to celebrate the presence of Jesus that day and how much courage it took for Jesus to move toward his impending death.

Hosanna, they said that first Palm Sunday, which literally means, "Save us, save us now!" From a parade centuries ago to a march yesterday in the streets of America I heard cries of "Save us." One voice at the DC rally said, "Let's save one another." Voice after voice, many of them 17

year olds---17 murdered at Parkland---saying “we’ve had enough.” “Enough is enough!” “We choose life!”

The young women and men from Parkland, and the millions across the country who marched for sensible gun laws and the restriction of assault weapons are inspirational. They’ve said that AR 15’s and other such guns are unnecessary for sport and protection. They’ve said, as the cover of Time magazine depicts, ENOUGH. Each student I’ve seen interviewed and read about is poised, articulate, and passionately engaged. Cameron, 17, from MSD said of he and his peers “we’re the mass shooting generation.” Emma Gonzalez when asked “who are you to protest?” says “This is my life! Action must be taken.” WAKE UP. David Hogg, who may very well end up President of the US unless Emma Gonzalez beats him to it, said of the last week’s walk-out of the classroom protest, “We walked out of the classroom, and we will walk into the voting booth.” Adding that he and the others do not want their generation’s movement to be a blip on a screen, saying, “We tell our youth peers, ‘you’ll need to stay awake for the rest of your lives!’” These young people are helping us to see the power and the real meaning of resistance.

I saw a sign yesterday that read: Thoughts and Prayers are not Bulletproof. We make a mockery of prayer when we ever pray a prayer that asks for help and then refuse to be our own answer to such requests. Pious pablum is all it amounts to. The cavalier, unfeeling emptiness of someone (politician or otherwise) saying, “you have my thoughts and prayers,” has become cliché and code for “good luck with that,” “hope it all turns out ok,” “be ye warm and well-fed,” but don’t really expect me to help out with that difficulty you’re facing.

The Gospels includes stories that are “thoughts and prayers-y,” with no action on the part of those who know better. Good Samaritan is a good example. Priest and Levite both walk away from a bloody and bruised victim of violence-robbery, passing by you can almost hear them say, “thoughts and prayers.” Empty. Hearers of the Word but not doers, James says.

Just this morning on ‘On Being With Krista Tippett’, she had as one of her guests the wonderful Quaker author-teacher, Parker Palmer, who spoke of his depression and its relationship to his spirituality. Palmer said, “Tillich described God as the ground of being. I no longer think of God as “up there” somewhere. I think of God as “down here,” which, I think, is — in my own Christian tradition, is pretty consistent with incarnational theology, with the whole notion of a God who journeyed to Earth to be among us compassionately: to suffer with us; to share the journey. I had embraced a form of Christian faith devoted less to the experience of God than to abstractions about God, a fact that now baffles me: how did so many disembodied concepts emerge from a tradition whose central commitment is to ‘the Word become flesh’?

In my growing up as a Christian, I didn’t get much help with that. A cross was a cross was a cross, and if you were suffering, it was supposed to be somehow good. But I think that there are false forms of suffering that get imposed upon us — sometimes, from without, from injustice and external cruelty; and sometimes, from within — that really need to be resisted. I do not believe that the God who gave me life wants me to live a living death. I believe that the God who gave me life wants me to live life fully and well. Now, is that going to take me to places where I suffer because I am standing for something or I am committed to something or I

am passionate about something that gets resisted and rejected by the society? Absolutely. But anyone who's ever suffered that way knows that it's a life-giving way to suffer; that if it's your truth, you can't not do it, and that knowledge carries you through. "

That's exactly what I heard from Emma Gonzalez when asked "who am I be part of this movement? Who am I NOT, this is my LIFE!" In moments of anguish waiting for folk to step into a moment to help you change any situation from death to life. Are we asleep to such moments?

The suspected Austin bomber who terrorized a town said he felt no remorse for deadly explosions that killed two people and terrorized the city, a congressman said Saturday. One of the victims, a young black man, Draylen Mason, died when he opened a package delivered to his home that contained a bomb. He was 17, a student at the Academy of the Arts (which is one of the most prestigious arts camps in the US), he played with the Austin Youth Symphony and even got to play with members of the LA Philharmonic (which is considered one of the best orchestras in the country.) He was an honors student and was expected to study music at a college conservatory. He was a boy, an artist and a good citizen. Dead at 17.

Marielle Franco of Brazil was assassinated last week. Franco, the black, gay Rio civil and human rights champion was murdered at 38 – a carefully targeted shooting by apparently professional killers – sent shockwaves across the world and is forcing Brazilians to ask searching questions about their country's inherent racism, violence and culture of impunity. ENOUGH. Brazil's prosecutor general, Raquel Dodge, called it an attack on democracy. "The only thing that she did was to work against the assassination of black people in the peripheral areas in the defense of human rights," says Lula da Silva.

Brazilians continue to mourn the loss of 38-year-old Rio de Janeiro city councilmember and human rights activist Marielle Franco. Franco was assassinated, along with her driver, last Wednesday night, after a pair of gunmen riddled her car with bullets as she returned from an event on the topic of empowering black women. Franco, who was a black lesbian, was known for her fierce criticism of police killings in Brazil's impoverished favela neighborhoods. The night before her death, Franco wrote on Twitter, "How many more must die for this war to end?" In January alone, government figures show police killed 154 people in Rio state. Thousands upon thousands of Brazilians took to the streets saying ENOUGH. It was a March for Their Lives too.

Abolitionist Frederick Douglass himself said of the malignant slaveholding version of Christianity in his day, between the Christianity of this land, and the Christianity of Christ, "I recognize the widest possible difference." This remains true to this day to me.

You don't need to travel to Brazil to see the weakening of democracy and the coarsening of civility do you? One need not go overseas to experience racial animus or the wideness possible difference between the Christianity of this land and the Christianity of Christ.

Michael Gerson in the most recent edition of Atlantic Monthly has written "How Evangelicals Lost Their Way", Gerson who has strong conservative and evangelical credentials, outlines the essential disconnect between Trump and evangelical teaching this way: ". . .the problem is the

distinctly non-Christian substance of his *values*. Trump's unapologetic materialism — his equation of financial and social success with human achievement and worth — is a negation of Christian teaching. His tribalism and hatred for 'the other' stand in direct opposition to Jesus's radical ethic of neighbor love. Trump's strength-worship and contempt for 'losers' smack more of Nietzsche than of Christ." Beyond that, he writes, "Loyalty to Trump has involved progressively more difficult, self-abasing demands. And there appears to be no limit to what some evangelical leaders will endure. . . The moral convictions of many evangelical leaders have become a function of their partisan identification. This is not mere gullibility; it is utter corruption. Blinded by political tribalism and hatred for their political opponents, these leaders can't see how they are undermining the causes to which they once dedicated their lives. Little remains of a distinctly Christian public witness." They fell asleep to their own corruption.

He writes:

"It is difficult to see something you so deeply value discredited so comprehensively. Evangelical faith has shaped my life, as it has the lives of millions. Evangelical history has provided me with models of conscience. Evangelical institutions have given me gifts of learning and purpose. Evangelical friends have shared my joys and sorrows. And now the very word is brought into needless disrepute.

"This is the result when Christians become one interest group among many, scrambling for benefits at the expense of others rather than seeking the welfare of the whole. Christianity is love of neighbor, or it has lost its way. And this sets an urgent task for evangelicals: to rescue their faith from its worst leaders."

Slowly perhaps, but some (ok a few) evangelicals are awaking from their sleep to say, ENOUGH.

The suffering that saves is a suffering willingly accepted in service of the good news of God for all people. This also means that it must be a suffering not only informed by God's purposes but also endured on behalf of others.

Turn back to Palm Sunday: Jesus comes riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. Make no mistake, the spiritual cries of Hosanna on that first Palm Sunday are also political rallying cries today. SAVE US. Is anyone awake?

At the abbey of Gethsemani in south-central Kentucky, where the Trappist monk Thomas Merton lived, the brothers there built a "garden of Gethsemane" out in the woods. When you approach it, you see a memorial plaque; the garden was built in memory of Jonathan Daniels, a young seminarian who was murdered in the civil rights movement of the '60's. Then you come to a sculpture, life-size, of the three disciples. They are reclined against one another, dead asleep. Then after a bit you go around a bend in the woods and see the solitary agonized figure of Jesus kneeling on a hard stone. His head is not bowed in pious resignation; his hands are not folded in prayer posture. His head is thrown back in agony, his hands cover his face. With his head thrown back you see his neck, a strong, sinewy neck, exposed to both heaven and earth. SAVE ME. LET THIS CUP PASS FROM ME. He prayed for some other way.

He asked the three; Peter, James, and John, to keep watch and pray with him. He asks us to not stay asleep in our gardens but to also watch and pray so that in our dark night of the soul prayer retreats---when trial and testing come, and they will come, we too will be ready and say, ENOUGH.

If you go back to look at the memorial plaque to Jonathan Daniels and investigate his story you'll find a remarkable story. Daniels joined the march to Montgomery and then, after most of the activists had returned home and the camera crews had packed up, he stayed.

While managing to complete his seminary coursework, he plunged into what he called "living theology": he helped with voter registration, photographed segregated conditions, worked to integrate a church, and lived with local families. Rachel West Nelson, whose family Jonathan stayed with, remembered that "he was part of our family. . . . In a way, he was a part of every black family in Selma in those days." He also encountered less than friendly locals. On August 14, 1965, Jonathan was part of a protest in Fort Deposit, Alabama. He, Stokely Carmichael, and some twenty others were arrested and held in the Hayneville county jail, where they sat for a week in the sweltering heat. On August 20 they were released and quickly set about trying to get to somewhere safe. While some of the activists organized rides, Jonathan and a Catholic priest named Richard Morrisroe along with two local women, Ruby Sales and Joyce Bailey, walked to a local store known to serve blacks and whites.

As Ruby opened the door, a figure from the shadows warned them off the property. Then the man raised a shot gun and pulled the trigger. Jonathan pulled Ruby from the line of fire and was hit instead. He was dead before he hit the ground. The gunman shot Father Morrisroe in the back, and then walked over to the county courthouse to call the state police chief and inform him he had just shot two preachers.

At Jonathan's funeral, many of the mourners stood around the grave and sang the anthem of the movement, "We Shall Overcome"-- a final tribute from those who had come to love this son of New England and his integrity, love, and commitment to freedom.

Even though Dr. King described Jonathan's last act as "one of the most heroic Christian deeds I have heard of in my entire ministry and career for civil rights," his story is seldom told.

Sometimes you have to step into a moment, even at the risk of losing your life, to say ENOUGH.

Disciples of every age are summoned not to forget, but to be alert and present to the agony of Christ, in whatever person or situation, in whatever place and time. This week I'll be thinking about Jesus a lot, Jesus needs my thoughts and prayers...and action. I'll be praying for all who suffer, which means I'll be praying and acting for Jesus. And Jesus will have your thoughts and prayers too, right?