

St. Thomas Episcopal Church in Medina, WA
The Rev. Canon Robert Hayman
Church Year C

Date: 5/8/16

Season: Easter 7

Acts 16:16-34 • Rev 22:12-14,16-17,20-21 • John 17-20-26

People are no damn good!

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How many times have we heard folks utter that statement? Or even say it ourselves (with the sub-conscious text meaning, other people).

Still, our TV screens are full of the appalling miseries of Syrian refugees trying to reach Europe while the bungling governments of the EU fail to act with human decency.

The festering sore of Palestine rumbles on, a disaster familiar to a number of our fellow parishioners who recently visited the Middle East.

Africans attack Africans in domestic blood baths and here in this enormously prosperous Northwest, there is no place for the homeless and beggars sit on the street corners of Seattle.

There is ample evidence of man's inhumanity to man. It is easy to dismiss all this misery, mayhem and injustice by saying, "People are no damn good."

But if we are Christians that flip phrase won't work. Truly, we have before us the evidence of sin but it is not all that simple. Truly, to say that people are no good is profoundly non-Christian. I am tempted to say, let us go back to our Sunday school lessons. But maybe you don't have any in your past. I hated Sunday school and found every reason not to go. I had to learn the lessons in another way.

If we turn to the first Chapter of Genesis, the first book of the Old Testament (but not the oldest) we come to the story of the creation. It is a story of how things came to be. It is not history. It is not science. It is myth if you understand that the word myth does not mean untrue, but rather means a story to explain how things are or came to be.

So we have the account of how God created the world in seven days, noting at the end of each day that what he had made was good. At the end of the sixth day he looked upon his whole creation and proclaimed it very good.

Then he said, let us make man in our own image, and his companion Eve. He placed them in the lovely Garden of Eden where they enjoyed perfect freedom save for eating of the fruit of one tree.

Well, the rest of the story is pretty well known, even without the benefit of Sunday school. Eve ate the forbidden fruit as did Adam, and for that free act of disobedience they

were tossed out into the cruel world and forced to work for a living. There you have it, a potted history of the Fall.

Using the non-historical history of the Old Testament, life developed pretty much along the lines we know. The miseries of the present were the miseries of the past.

God who had made the world and had pronounced it good, God who had made man in his own image, looked down from heaven, looked at the world he loved, looked at the men and women he loved, and entered into that life in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

God became incarnate. God became enfleshed, if you will, in Jesus. God himself was made manifest in the life, work, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus.

Now in the meantime, what about all the things that have gone wrong? Ever since the mythological events of the Garden of Eden people have made bad choices. The phrase “bad choices” often appears in pop psychology, but from a Biblical point of view a bad choice is sin.

I do not want to oversimplify. The problems of addiction, the problems of mental illness and the stresses of social upheaval cannot be waved aside by simply saying Sin. On the other hand, a series of bad choices, a series of sinful behavior has clearly led to horror in the Middle East, butchery in Africa and abandoned citizens in our own community.

People made in God’s image are not bad. They are essentially good. They do not always make bad choices. History, thank God, is adorned by men and women who have done the right thing, who have benefitted society and who have sacrificed themselves for the sake of others. They are in our midst today.

So it was into this world where so much had gone wrong, and where so many had pointed the way to the good, that Jesus came. Came and lived with us and in us, knowing love and sorrow, hunger and thirst, temptation and joy.

On the cross and in his resurrection he overcame the heritage of sin, of bad choices, that followed disobedience in the Garden. His sacrifice became a new covenant of love between God and man and his resurrection was the proclamation that good is stronger than evil and life triumphs over death.

But the story is not quite complete. Somehow in the mystery of the resurrection the authentic man Jesus remains. As the risen Jesus parted from his disciples returned to the Father. The Bible describes it as an ascension. Remember the authors of the New Testament believed in a three story universe: heaven above, earth beneath and the waters under the earth. Our understanding of the universe is far different, shaped by modern

science. But the New Testament writers saw heaven as above and a return to the God who dwells above as going up.

Traditionally the Church celebrates the ascension of Jesus 40 days after Easter. So....Ascension Day was Thursday of last week.

Here is the Christian proclamation. Jesus who shared our true humanity carried that humanity with him in the mystery of the ascension. God does not just know about human life. He has experienced it.

In the midst of human disaster, and in the midst of human glory, we have the promise of the resurrection and the sure and certain hope that our destiny is to dwell with God himself.

The 19th century bishop, Christopher Wordsworth, a nephew of the celebrated poet, put it this way:

“Thou hast raised our human nature
On the clouds to God’s right hand
There we sit in heavenly places
There with Thee in glory stand”

Jesus reigns adored by angels
Man with God is on the throne
Mighty Lord in thine ascension
We by faith behold our own.”

Mighty Lord in thine ascension/We by faith behold our own. There you have the third verse of our last hymn this morning. As you sing it, think upon it. Amen.