

LELC Easter 4 (Mother's Day)

The fourth Sunday of Easter is always Good Shepherd Sunday, a chance to focus on this much-loved image of Jesus as our good shepherd. Here at LELC it is the last day of Sunday School and we are appreciating our kids and their teachers. It also happens to be Mother's Day. Right there the "Cute-ness Overload" alarm bells should be going off.

Every preacher I know learns really early on that Mother's Day – if you are paying attention – in a veritable minefield. All the commercials and glowing Facebook posts aside, Mother's Day is rough for lots of folks, either because they lost their mothers, or they want desperately to be mothers. There are kids who don't have good relationships with their mothers and mothers who don't have good relationships with their kids. Over all that, at some point all a preacher can do is pray for God's blessings of whatever it is we each need the most.

But I think the thing that bothers me the most about the state of Mother's Day these days is how completely it has changed from the original intent of Mother's Day. The original call to observe a Mother's Day was the proclamation by Julia Ward Howe that is printed on the front of the bulletin. It was written in 1870. Hold in your minds scenes of the devastation and loss that was still being suffered in 1870 - the aftermath of the Civil War. To which Julia Ward Howe said this.. (Quote..)

This is still decades before women can vote. The theory went like this: women were the fairer sex, more gentle and pure so they should not sully themselves with the rough and tumble of public life. Women should stay home and raise the children and leave the messiness of politics and decision-making to the men.

But in Howe's call to action you can hear the grief and despair and, I daresay, rage that still shaped their days. She issues this great call to gather, to speak out, to put themselves in the way of the world's same old, same old. In their grief and rage they can not afford the luxury of despair. Mothers can not, will not, go another season merely hoping things will all work out. It was time to rise up and work together to bring an end to war and bloodshed and seek the things that make for peace.

These days I find that I relate to that despair, and grief and rage all too well. One day it might be mostly about racism, the next sexism, the next immigration issues or

environmental ones, and with alarming frequency: violence – the terrorism of mass shootings. I find myself going numb just so I won't be in a constant rage.

The other day it was a FB post, which to be fair was probably fictitious. It was a video of a training for employees about what to do in the case of an active shooter. The “teacher” was a 10year-old girl, passing along the tips they learn in school, singing for the adults the ditty her teacher made them learn to help keep them safe, “Go and hide, but don't you cry, don't make a sound or you'll be found.”

I'm sure that this was posted in response to the shooting in Denver – which is barely making the news. It was all I could do to keep from curling up on the floor in a weeping fit of grief and rage and despair. Are we supposed to accept this as the new normal? I, for one, am NOT WILLING! I hold on desperately to the truth that this despair and grief and rage is borne of love. Love is of God. And God has promised us that this death upon death is not, can not, be the last word.

It is, in my opinion, a work of the Devil, craftiness at its finest, to have taken the great call to action that was the origin of Mother's Day and turn it into a day to sell flowers and chocolates and praise moms for spending all her time picking up dirty socks and driving carpool. Originally Mother's Day was about leaving “all that may be left of home for a great and earnest day of counsel.” and now its about being adored for staying home. The power to accomplish something good, something of God, has been sucked right out of it.

Truth be told, the same thing has happened to the image of the Good Shepherd. The Shepherd image was central to the early Christians because in Jesus, all these outcasts of society, the sinners, the tax collectors, the lepers, the poor, and the uppity women, came together into community where they cared for one another and for those in need. They were the strays and in Jesus, they were gathered together.

Now, in the mutual care of one Shepherd, they belonged to a people where someone would have their back, someone would see to their loved ones if something happened to them. So they could go out in the world and live out the love of Jesus fearlessly.

Nowadays, the shepherd is mostly about me and Jesus, about being kept safe and secure in Jesus' arms so we can ignore the world. An image that was meant to make Jesus' followers fearless has been turned into something that makes us docile.

But it is time, my friends in Christ, to wake up, to recognize what the Devil has been doing. It is time to rise up. Mothers. Women, People of goodwill. It is time for us all to rise up, whether our baptisms be of water, or blood or tears. It is time to reclaim something of the original Mother's Day. It is time to rise up and oppose all that oppresses, or excludes, or exploits or abuses in ^{any mother's child as if it were our own} whatever corner of the world we find ourselves, by whatever nonviolent means we have available to us.

We are at a moment of urgency that is unprecedented in human history. There is another mother, her name is Mother Earth, who is also rising up. The climate chaos that is being brought on by our overuse of fossil fuels and the extinctions that are being caused by our pollution and destruction of habitats cannot be ignored. We humans should not consider ourselves so precious that Mother Earth will not rise up in defense of her 4-footed, finned, and feathered children. ^{Shooting → Powers to be care little about what children as they do black or brown. Wake up! Rise up! For All Children}

The only good news that can sustain us in the moments like this is to know that the work to which we are called is not ours alone. We have a role – but we are not alone. It does not depend on us getting it right or having it far enough up on our to-do lists. This struggle is bigger than us. We can rise up because we are part of the Body of the RISEN Christ. Not only must we work together to turn back the evil that is ravaging our world, it is the ONLY thing that we can do this work: together.

While rage and grief might get us off the couch some days, we cannot act from that alone. We must let the love come through. The love we know as mothers, sisters, brothers, people who are loved by God and who have come to love the precious ones God loves. Sheep of the same flock, tended by the same shepherd.

^{Let Love turn our despair to hope our rage to compassion}
^{our grief to joy}

We live with the hope that Easter promises. But we also live knowing that Pentecost's a'coming. That Holy Spirit comes to us. It is time to let the Holy Spirit (who is always "she" to me) stir us from placidness, to let the might wind of the Holy Spirit, lift our spirits, carry our voices, help us to know that the mama bear love inside all of us is meant for moments like this. It is time to rise up, rise up, all people, to take counsel and find the ways whereby the great human family can live in peace and learn the ways, not of ~~caesar~~, but of God. Amen.

^{powers that be}