

Good Friday Sermon 2018

*Originally* I had prepared a different sermon. This one here. But I'm finding that it's really not *possible* for me to stand up here today, on this particular Good Friday, and NOT speak about March for Our Lives. It's not my country and in many ways not my *issue*. This isn't the first time I've preached about school shootings in the US, but I don't want to stand up here in the comfort and safety of my Point Grey pulpit and sit in judgement on a situation that I'm really not *going through*.

But last Saturday's 'March For Our Lives', and really all the events since the massacre at Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High on St. Valentine's Day, reveal something that *CANNOT* be passed by on Good Friday. In these events the *power* that can be wielded by the small, the vulnerable, the disenfranchised, and the apparently power-less has been so *nakedly* visible. That is rare in our North American context I find. I really cannot think of any recent events like this. It's like an entire nation *slept* through literally hundreds of *school shootings* until *the children* suddenly stood up and said something so powerfully obvious that it shames every adult: 'we don't want to be shot and killed at school.'

Again, it's not my country, not my situation, but my *anger* at this *hurts*. I can barely contain it. The word *outrage* does not *begin* to describe it. So I *guess* that makes it my issue. I don't know how much this has been looked at as a human rights issue but the idea that children might *not* have the right not to be shot and killed at school just doesn't fit in my head. It doesn't fit in this world. It isn't an idea. It definitely isn't *human*.

In the Gospel of Mark Jesus finds that His disciples are caught up in a sort of ego dispute about who among them is the greatest. To help them learn about their own blindness and stupidity in even entertaining an argument like that, He doesn't scold them. He doesn't explain. He bends down and takes up a child in His arms, and He says what to me are the wisest of words: "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me."

'If any of you put a stumbling-block before one of these little ones ... it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea.'" Cut off your hand! Tear out your eye! Cut off your foot! "it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell." These are the words of Jesus and that is the hell we have been in! Until children stood up and marched for their lives!

That is a Good Friday if I ever saw one. If you don't think things are going to change now you just watch. They can't sit in House of Representatives or the Senate or run for President. They can't even vote. They are literally disenfranchised. Most probably can't drive. But my God, can they speak!

The specifics are quite different from Good Friday. They are children. Jesus was a mature adult. They marched in the hundreds of thousands, perhaps a million. Jesus and His disciples made a dozen - not counting Judas. It took decades, centuries really, for the message of what Jesus did on Good Friday to spread throughout the Middle East and the Roman Empire, through the power of individual witness. So transformed were the disciples that they became Apostles. Many of them were martyred in this same way. So powerful was the presence of these direct witnesses that after 300 years the entire empire was converted to Christianity by witnesses of the witnesses. We all were made witnesses of March For Our Lives instantaneously through electronic media. And yet there is something about those who were actually there at the shooting. The power of witness. We *heard* that in some of the speeches at the march. We *heard* it even when they did not speak and stood in silence. Emma Gonzalez six minutes of silence was called 'the loudest silence in the history of American protest.' The power of witness.

The situation at Golgotha and what followed was different than it was at Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School and following, but the principle of non-violence is the same. Jesus did *not* die because His time had run out, or because the Pharisees finally caught up with Him, or because God wanted to shame us. I just have never thought that He died to pay the debt of our sin. That explanation has never rung true for me or for most of the generation I was at seminary with. He did not die in any kind of haphazard way. He died intentionally. Chose it beforehand. Chose His own non-violence as the means of it. He himself was a witness — to the innocent death of John the Baptist and likely others — so He taught and prepared His disciples assiduously beforehand. Though they did not understand it until afterwards, He *prepared* them to become witnesses. I have read that the students at Stoneman were being prepared as witnesses as well, by a particularly astute teacher. They had been studying school shootings and how to use media. If you are here on Good Friday you are being prepared too.

Most of all we need to know that Jesus died to reveal something — to us, something we are not *born* knowing. To show us that it is *possible* for human beings to *live into* our dying. To live *beyond* our dying. Our primal instinct to remain physically alive blinds us to this. But Jesus saw beyond that. He died to equip us with resurrection, to equip the witnesses of Marjorie Stoneman and

Sandy Hook with *resurrection*. And by resurrection He meant a transformation of human life. In resurrection we no longer live our lives toward death as a final end. In resurrection fear and darkness and secrecy no longer have power. They are no longer tools of oppression. In resurrection dying can become the means of life for others.

When Jesus died on the cross He became more alive than ever. Before the cross He was one person — or in the historic teaching of the church, two persons fully human and fully divine. After the Cross He was thousands, untold millions of people and still counting. Perhaps after last Saturday the same will be true of the 17 at Marjorie Stoneman Douglas and the 26 at Sandy Hook and the thousands of others. Last Saturday gave me hope — and I don't think I'm alone — that February 14th 2018 — Ash Wednesday it was — maybe that day will become Good Friday, the day everything changed and there began to be *resurrection* for the innocents, that what seemed like an unstoppable arms lobby in the US was finally *witnessed* and that the power to change it rested where Good Friday revealed it to be, where perhaps it has always been: with the innocent, the vulnerable, the non-violent. It rested with children.

I could almost say that I don't care where this idea of non-violence originated. All I care about is that the youth and children who are the movers and shakers of March For Our Lives *know* they have

it. *Except. Except* we have sat in this room and had it read to us every single week. That implicates us.

We were baptized in His name. That implicates us. That makes it our responsibility to *know* that He *told* us about it. Every Easter we renew our baptismal vows in which we promise listen to Him and follow Him. That makes it our responsibility to know that He *showed* it to us with His bleeding dead body hung up on a cross.

In 2015 the Pope went to speak in Congress and said that people who say they are Christians and yet are also arms manufacturers have blood on their hands. “That leads to a bit a distrust, doesn’t it?” Christianity *is* held in distrust by many today — for these good reasons and many other failures in our history — and yet it’s power continues to be the non-violence of Jesus on Good Friday. That’s the thing that has stuck to us. That’s the thing that can’t be put away. The Crucifixion spattered it all over us like Jesus’ blood. We have it on us and in us. The Eucharist reminds of that every Sunday. When you read the Gospels it becomes unmistakable, *unavoidable*, that Jesus knew this beforehand. Now we know it too.