

Sermon: We wake up on Monday morning and there's this thing in the news ...

Year A, Proper 22

[Isaiah 5:1-7](#); [Psalm 80:7-15](#); [Philippians 3:4b-14](#); [Matthew 21:33-46](#)

Offered October 8, 2017 to Brookline Community Church, Brookline, NH

Rev. Catherine A. Merrill

We woke up Monday morning and there was this thing in the news. This thing we had seen before. A gun man. A crowd of people. Chaos and running and 911 calls and cell phone videos. Survivors talking kind of incoherently to local press people who looked incoherent themselves. Statements from law enforcement. Estimates of the dead and wounded, all covered around with asterisks because they were still figuring out the numbers. Thoughts and prayers from the politicians. Flowers and candles near the site, or as near as the cops would let someone get. We woke up on Monday morning and there was this thing in the news.

By Monday night we had enough of the facts established to know how it would go. Who would rush in and who would speak out. The folks who oppose anyone owning any gun would say this thing. The folks who oppose anyone putting any restrictions on owning any gun would say that. Someone famous would say something controversial on Facebook or Twitter. Law enforcement would do its thing, and we would soak it up, hoping to hear something we could grab onto to keep a similar thing from happening to us. By Monday night we knew how it was going to go. And it pretty much did.

We're paying attention. We're aware of the world we're in. We're pretty accurate in our predictions of how the story is going to go.

How can we send our kids out into this world? How can we console our parents who keep telling us they're not so sorry to be leaving this world soon? How can we look our co-workers in the eye when they ask how we can believe in God? We live in this world where a shooting on Sunday night will play out so predictably that we can write just about everything down, in the order that it will happen, less than twelve hours after we learn of it.

So here's a question. Which one was Kimberly Morris killed at? Was that Mother Emmanuel? Or at the Bataclan theater in Paris? Or in Las Vegas? Or San Bernadino?

We show up on a Sunday morning and listen to a 2,000 year old letter, hoping to find an answer. Paul says things that we want to say today. Paul says, "I want to know Christ" (Philippians 3:10). So do we. Paul says, "and the power of his resurrection." (Philippians 3:10) Amen, Brother Paul. Paul says, "and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead." (Philippians 3:10-11) Even that we would say.

Because there's an intimacy there. We want to be in such close connection with Jesus that we share his sufferings, become like him in his death.

But note the order Paul says that in.¹ I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings. We need know the power of his resurrection before we share his sufferings. The power of his resurrection. The resurrection which is the guarantee that the physical body is sacred. The resurrection that is the guarantee that death is not the end of life

¹ Ernest F. Scott, "The Epistle to the Philippians: Exegesis," vol. 11 in *The Interpreter's Bible: The Holy Bible in the King James and Revised Standard Versions with General Articles and Introduction, Exegesis, Exposition for Each Book of the Bible*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1955), 85.

and that there is a world beyond. The resurrection that is the guarantee that nothing in life or in death can separate us from the love of God.² Let us know that power first and we can share in his sufferings.

Let us know the power of the resurrection. Jesus of Nazareth, a poor carpenter, taking on the princes and powers of his world with nothing more than the love of God and the love of neighbor. Jesus of Nazareth, whose death on the cross should have sunk below the waves of history with no ripple whatsoever. And would have, except for the love of God and the love of neighbor.

And a man named Saul who was a Big Deal. Born to the right family, one of the elites. Busted his back doing all the right things. Kept the Jewish law so well that he was blameless, meaning, you couldn't even get him for a sin of omission, he was that good at obeying the law.³ Saul who became Paul and walked away from everything he had, everything he had been, everything that defined who he was as a person. Walked away to share with others how much it mattered to love God and love your neighbors.

And not just God in general. But this God. The God of the book. The God who revealed God's self to individuals. To families, in particular moments. They didn't seem like really special families. In fact, most of them were kind of a mess. And yet God showed up for them and said, "I am your God and you are my people."

And not just neighbors in general. But this neighbor, right here. This one who was wearing a cowboy hat and singing along with "When She Says Baby". This one, right here, who gathers up someone else's kid and takes them to safety. This one, right here, who keeps it together when the 911 switchboard is lighting up. This one, right here, who keeps cleaning up the Emergency Room waiting area, because people keep coming and coming and leaving half empty coffee cups.

Paul shares his absolute conviction that God is telling us to love this particular God and this particular neighbor. When we do that, this particular man from Nazareth doesn't disappear from the world. This particular man from Nazareth is revealed for who he really is, the Son of God. That particular life stays with us. That particular death stays with us. The resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth is our God saying that particulars matter. Lives in this world matter. Matter so much that death is not the end. Matter so much that even death cannot separate us from the love of Jesus of Nazareth.

We learn about the intimate power of the resurrection from Paul. And we learn about it from every mom who puts a blueberry smiley face in a pancake when she's aching for ten more minutes sleep. We learn about it from every dad who fills the tank before our date. We learn about it from teachers who find abilities in our kids we never knew were there. We learn about it from musicians who join their voices to help us weep for the 59 lives lost to this world and reunited with their Creator. We learn about the intimate power of the resurrection from particular people who do the small acts in this world that insist that each particular life matters, because Jesus' particular life mattered.

When we learn the power of the resurrection, we can share in Christ's suffering, of an innocent person confronting violence which tears particular bodies apart. We may not know that

² William Barclay, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians*. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975), 64.

³ Barclay, 61.

Kimberly Morris was killed at the Pulse Night Club in Orlando on June 12, 2016. But we know that at each of these shootings, particular lives are ended. We know that those particular lives mattered, even if we cannot know the details. That knowledge is part of the suffering we share with Christ. Just as we share the knowledge that the power of his resurrection means love leaves behind more than death can take away.

Even when we wake up the next Monday morning and there's another thing in the news.