

Twenty-seventh Sunday OT – Year A – 10/8/17

As I read this week's gospel and scripture, I wondered what could I say. The natural disasters of hurricanes and earthquakes happen, but the senseless violence in Las Vegas and amazingly the threat of more war seem to loom over us. The global culture of violence and hatred by humanity against humanity seems hopeless. I read the story Jesus' parable of the vineyard with the eyeglasses of the terrible violence in the story. The greedy tenants felt they could achieve more wealth by killing the messengers and eventually the landowner's son by taking lives. And the violence led to more violence TO them. It spiraled.

Jesus aims this story at the chief priests and the elders, who failed to listen to the prophets of God, even killing them. Jesus knew that they were after him. He would not be trapped by the violence of the culture. Nothing good comes from killing another...nothing. And so he succumbed to the violence of his times. BUT he would not participate in the violence. There was a better way. Everything given us is to be shared.

The root of evil is greed. Stephen Paddock seemingly had it all. Why did he do that? They haven't found a motive for his senseless action. "Rage is self-defeating and all-consuming. It's a rigged game, one that even a multi-millionaire video poker expert could never win." Christopher Keating writes in his PD Religion column today (10-7-17). He goes on to say:

"And like so many other incidents of violence, the collateral damage was enormous. The trauma created by this massacre wounds all of us – just as it did in a church in Charleston, S.C., or a Christmas party in San Bernardino, CA, or in a nightclub in Orlando, FL, or in a City Council meeting in Kirkwood. Each shooting re-traumatizes the victims, keeping us from taking action that could prevent further killings.

"Jesus warned against this sort of entrapment. He reminded his disciples that life is more than gathering symbols of status. His teachings remind us that wealth is always a gift to be used for the enriching of others, and that pursuing wealth for its own sake will never bring us peace. If you doubt that, consider that while we are offended by Paddock's actions we also envy his wealth and privilege and perks and status. Mandalay Bay's towering hotel invites us to see reflections of ourselves. They call us to confess that materialism and its trappings cannot save us. Stephen Paddock had it all – wealth, planes, property, investments, perks – but he gambled it away because it was not ENOUGH.

"It is never enough. Fortunately, the story does not end there. The broken glass of Mandalay Bay hotel also reflects rays of hope. The panels show us faces of those who placed their lives on the line to help. They illuminate how a community of love emerges from the shards of terror. These broken panes may offer us a place to heal so that we may exchange expressions of rage for ways of peace. May that be our prayer."

As I see it through my glasses of faith, the gospel is a challenge to ask: what do I do with the rage that sometimes enters my own heart. Do I seek reconciliation with others who have offended me or whom I have offended? Bishop Braxton addresses racism in his *Messenger* column this week by stating "We must start with ourselves." When we use words like THEM and THEY and ME and MINE...can we instead talk about US?

This vineyard parable is about us. Where are we in the story? Are we the landowner, the tenants, the messengers or son? To be honest I've got to answer YES in a way to each at times. How about you?

How do we follow Christ in all of this?