

Matthew 2:18 (Jeremiah 31:15)  
Slaughter of the Innocents  
5.29.22 WRCoB

There are times when a preacher  
Tosses a planned sermon  
To preach what's on the heart.

Today is one of those Sundays.

The killings in Buffalo, NY at the Tops Grocery Store  
And Robb Elementary School in Ulvude, TX  
Has caused me a tremendous sense of grief.

So too, has the constant stream of news  
Of gun violence in Richmond.

The latest victim, 17-year-old Diamond Brown Mosby  
A senior at Henrico High School.

Today's sermon is a sermon of lament.

I lament.

"Why Lord?" I keep asking.

Why would you allow such evil to fall upon the innocent?

Why Lord, is there such hatred in the world?

Why such complete disregard for the sanctity of life?

And why, Lord, must the innocent suffer so much  
In a world filled with such violence?

I am so sick of it!

I am angry!

I am angry at partisan politics  
At callous and uncaring people  
At racists and xenophobics

I am angry at people who would bend their morality  
For power, profit, and position.

I am angry at God

If we believe God can and does intervene  
In the affairs of this world  
Than why won't God intervene now!

I lament!

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Of course, violence is nothing new.

As the author of Ecclesiastes writes  
There is nothing new under the sun.

The Bible is filled with death and destruction  
Some of it seemingly prompted by God.

Violence enters the human story in the second generation.

**Genesis 4:8 NIV Now Cain said to his brother Abel,  
“Let's go out to the field.” While they were in the field,  
Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.**

From that first murder violence became part of the culture

**Genesis 6:11 NLT**

**<sup>11</sup> Now God saw that the earth had become corrupt and was filled with violence.**

**Genesis 6:13 CEV**

**<sup>13</sup> So he told Noah: Cruelty and violence have spread everywhere. Now I'm going to destroy the whole earth and all its people.**

God is sick of the violence.

**Psalm 11:5 CEV The Lord . . . despises those who are cruel and love violence.**

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We got a problem in the United States.  
We live in a very violent culture.

There are more guns in the US than there are people.  
120 firearms for every 100 people.

There are nations with a higher per capita murder rate.

But no nation comes close to the US  
When ranked in a higher income category.

According to an article from BBC this past Wednesday

*In 2020 alone, more than 45,000 Americans died at the end of a barrel of a gun, whether by homicide or suicide, more than any other year on record. The figure represents a 25%*

*increase from five years prior, and a 43% increase from 2010.*

Gun violence has crazy high proportions in America.

But it is not just mass shootings  
We need to be concerned about.

Suicide by guns  
Neighborhoods terrorized by violence  
And even accidental shootings.

The soul of our nation is sick!

And it seems there's nothing we can do about it.

We are stuck in how to address it.

It is about stricter background checks  
And bans on certain military-style assault weapons.

The majority of Americans support this kind of legislation.

But the Senate is mired down in partisan politics  
Completely dysfunctional and incapable  
Of passing any fruitful laws on gun safety.

It is about that!  
But it's more than that.

It's about mental instability and social isolation  
It's about violent video games  
It's about our addictions to drugs.

We have got a mental health crisis in our country.

And if we don't take a serious look

At the mental health of our younger generations  
Violence will only get worse.

But it's not just about mental health.

It is that, but it's more.

Tighter security in schools?

Arming teachers with weapons?

Arming teachers?

Will that solve the problem?

These are reactive responses.

We need proactive measures

Cutting at the heart of this disease of violence.

It's about poverty and the economy

It's about a divided nation.

It's about the lack of equitable opportunities

It is about racism and xenophobia

It is about the lack of respect for law and institution

It's about broken homes and single parents.

It is a complicated web that has no easy solutions.

It is all that.

But it is more than that.

The United States is having a spiritual crisis.

From a Christian perspective

We need to confess and repent of our sins  
Whether we are actively condoning violence  
Or passively looking the other way.

**2 Chronicles 7:14 NLT If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and restore their land.**

The church has to be on the cutting edge  
Of the movement to change the ethos of our culture.

To build a community that recognizes the image of God  
In all the faces of all the peoples in this nation.

The church has to step up to the challenges facing us.

If not the church, who?  
If not now, when?

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Our passage today is a quote used by Matthew  
That originates from the OT's Book of Jeremiah.

Jeremiah witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem  
And the forced displacement of Jews to Babylon.

Like the Trail of Tears the Cherokee Nations trekked  
From North Carolina to Oklahoma  
The Ukrainian civilian population  
Fleeing violence from Russia's invasion

The nation of Israel walked their trail of tears  
From Jerusalem to Babylon.

Rachel, the dead matriarch and wife to Jacob  
Buried alongside the road leading out of Bethlehem

Mourned for the children of Jeremiah's day  
As they plodded past her grave into exile.

Matthew quotes Jeremiah  
That, Rachel, from her grave's vantage point  
Also bears witness, this time

To the slaughter of the innocents at the hand of Herod.

Today, we bear witness  
To the continuation of violence against the innocent.

The list is long.

The latest, the dear folks  
At the Tops Grocery Store in Buffalo, NY

And those 19 children and two dedicated teachers  
At Robb Elementary School in Ulvade, TX

And our own Diamond Brown Mosby of Henrico High.

**Matthew 2:18 NIV**

**<sup>18</sup> "A voice is heard in Ramah,  
weeping and great mourning,  
Rachel weeping for her children**

**and refusing to be comforted,  
because they are no more.”**

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We lament.

Some think a lament is just complaining to God  
And we shouldn't do it.

But 40% of the Psalms are laments.

The late N.T. Wright lists five things  
To help us understand Biblical lament.

- 1. Lament is a form of praise.** Whereas a complaint is an accusation against God that criticizes [God's] character, a lament is an appeal to God based on confidence in [God's] character.
- 2. Lament is a proof of the relationship.** When we take our lament to God it proves that, indeed, there is a relationship between God and us.
- 3. Lament is a pathway to intimacy with God.** A lament is the sincere and honest expression of emotions before God. By being open before God we enter a deeper relationship with God.
- 4. Lament is a prayer for God to act.** Biblical lament is not simply expressing our grief, our anger, our pain, our frustrations to God, though it does help to vent. Lament is a prayer to God to intervene in the affairs of humankind according to God's will and way.
- 5. Lament is a participation in the pain of others.** Lament is not only for those who suffer directly. It is also for those who stand in solidarity with those who

suffer. Their pain becomes our own, the very essence of Christ.

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We know Jesus was aware of the violence in his world.

He knew he was a threat

Not only to the religious institution

But to the Romans' violent enforcement

Of Pax Romana, Peace of the Empire.

Frederick Buechner writes

*He had every reason to know that his death was upon him, and although it would seem that he could have avoided it easily enough—all that he had to do, presumably, was to get out of the city and lay low for a while—he chose to stay and die because he was convinced that this was the will of God.*

*He felt that his death was necessary if the world was to be saved from the very evil that was destroying him.*

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In the taking of the bread and the cup

We lament the evil inflicted upon our Savior.

In mutual participation, we stand in solidarity to his sufferings

And stand in solidarity to all who suffer.

### **Psalm 90:14-15 NRSV**

**14 Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, so that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.**

**15 Make us glad as many days as you have afflicted us and as many years as we have seen evil.**

