

“We Have Met the Enemy”

This is the seventh Sunday of Easter. We should be joyful as we celebrate the wonder and promise that the resurrection means for us and for the whole world. But this world is broken. My heart is heavy after yet another massacre of people doing their jobs and attempting to live normal lives. My heart is sick just as it was after Sandy Hook, Virginia Tech, Columbine, Fort Hood, Aurora, Pulse, Tree of Life Synagogue, and the list goes on and on and on.

The world does not seem to want to hear the joyful news of the resurrection. Instead we live for our egos and desires. We could look at each person as a potential friend, ally or just another human being trying to make his or her way in the world. Instead we look at everyone with suspicion. We walk around on the lookout to be hurt ready to lash out at the slightest perception of insult or injury. Forgiveness has left our vocabulary. We live to hold onto a grudge, to get revenge, to hurt because we have been hurt.

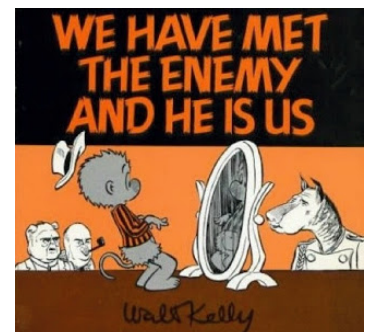
There are plenty of places to lay blame for this state of affairs. The political environment and the lack of civility in public discourse with politicians calling each other names instead of getting the work of the people done. Politics has become theater of the absurd in service to nothing but ego.

We can blame social media like Twitter and Facebook. Technology has outrun our ability to regulate it. The innovators are more interested in their next million than they are in putting credible tools in place to prevent or at least curtail abuse by political powers, secret agencies, individual abusers, child predators, and those who prey on the elderly and naïve.

Cable news is due its share of the blame. The 24/7 news cycle needs fodder to keep the ratings up and please sponsors and nothing is better for that than the sensational. Cable pundits and commentators who do not report the news but want to make the news via outrageous claims, false accusations, and conspiracy theories are not without their share.

The truth is that each of these is but a symptom of the greater problem. As Walt Kelly wrote many years ago in his comic strip “Pogo”, “We have met the enemy and he is us.” It is clever but it is not funny. The problem is not the politicians, news media, social media, or any other scapegoat we could mention. It is us—you and me.

We seem to enjoy the broken political system, rather than demanding more of our elected representatives. We enjoy the political theater as entertainment, and enjoy raging about how the evils of the other. We enjoy ranting on Facebook as we insult longtime friends, hurl expletives at relatives, and impugn the integrity of loved ones. We tune in to our favorite cable news channel, not so much to hear the news of the day, as to hear commentators trash the other side. Someone with the integrity



of Walter Cronkite or David Brinkley would not survive a week in this current environment.

The problem is not new, look at today's passage from Acts. Paul and Silas are trying to preach the Good News of Jesus, but their preaching has become a spectacle due to a possessed woman who identifies them as "slaves of the Most High God." When they expel the spirit from the woman instead of being congratulated on the wondrous healing they end up in prison, because the woman's handlers were using her for money. Her entertainment value is more important than the Good News of salvation.

For nearly two thousand years the community of Christ has echoed the words of Revelation saying "Come Lord Jesus, Come." We have cried out to heaven for intervention while sitting on our haunches waiting for God to fix it.

It is no surprise that so many people scoff at Christianity when religious leaders join in the political show condemning outsiders, while smugly living lives of deceit and hypocrisy. All we do is send our "thoughts and prayers" instead of realizing that we have been empowered by God to act.

In today's reading from John Jesus says, "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they **may all be one**. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. **The glory that you have given me I have given them**, so that they may be one, as we are one." If we really believed the Gospel we would not be name calling, vilifying, and delighting in divisive media. We would be looking for ways to love each because we each contain the glory of God. Instead of indulging our base appetites for vengeance and victimhood we would be turning off the biased media and demanding unbiased reporting. We would refrain from firing off hurtful emails and tweets, and not follow those who abuse social media for ego or to spread lies.

Jesus calls us to live in love with one another. Jesus prays that we live in God and let God live in us. Jesus prays that we share the glory that he has shared with the Father. There is no room in us for God if we fill ourselves with the very things that we blame for our calamity. We are called to make space in our hearts for goodness and mercy, for justice and peace, for honoring and loving our neighbor, and speaking truth in love, not fury, to those that would draw us away from Christ.

John Donne poet and Anglican priest wrote these lines 400 years ago:

No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as any [house] of thy friends or of thine own were; any man's death diminishes me, because I am

involved in mankind. And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

We are diminished by the deaths of many. We are diminished by our failing to act to stop, or at least abate, the carnage. We demand too little of our politicians, media, and ourselves. Until we can accept that the bell is tolling to call us to worship and to action nothing will change. Until we take it upon ourselves to live into the glory of the gift Jesus prayed upon us all, things will remain broken. As long as we get more joy from ranting than loving, we will limp along bewildered at how bad others are while never admitting our own faults. And innocent people will die leaving families and communities shattered and far too many hearts broken.