

What Do You See?

Sometimes, when you're a preacher, you get lessons in the Sunday lectionary that are so beautiful that you can hardly wait to sit down and write about them- they're wondrous...You want to- have to -talk about them.

But then- other times you get readings that are so horrific (at least when you first read them)-

that you know that you have to talk about them.

Today is one of those days- we have the story of the binding of Isaac - and it's so foreign to our sensibilities- so horrific- that we simply recoil.

God tells Abraham- who is the Father of the Israelite nation- to take his Isaac- his only son- the son of his old age- and to sacrifice him.

That's enough to make our blood run cold- it's a repugnant idea- gives me cold chills.

Some of you may know that I have a son who is a priest- he's the youngest of our three sons.

-and he graduated from seminary – Sewanee- 4 years ago-

and so it's fun to talk about sermons- what he's going to say- or not say.

This week John and I were talking on Zoom- and I said-

“So- John- are you preaching this weekend?”

He said he was taking the weekend off-

and I said something like...

“well- do you know what the Old Testament reading is?-

It's the binding of Isaac!”

John said “That's a great reading- I love to preach about that -because it shows that a nation can change-

That was the end of child sacrifice-

the Israelites didn't sacrifice children anymore!"

We had a little conversation about how he knew that-

to which he said a rabbi had taught about it and that was what he said. –

***As an aside- some Christians are horrified that child sacrifice**

was ever practiced – but it is true- they did that-

- you have to remember this was hundreds of years before Moses-

it was an primitive culture-- around 1500 years BC-

and as horrible as it is to us- it was the norm for some primitive peoples.

After the time of Abraham – there was no more child sacrifice-

The culture changed.

I think we need to remember two things from this:

One- cultures can change-

and second- that change was brought about by God.

Abraham had been obedient to what he understood he was to do-

It was God who intervened- It was God who brought about the change.

Our culture is at a point of change right now-

we can't say that there's no unrest- no violence-

-but I think we often don't see the hope- the joy that's beginning to bloom

right before our eyes-

We need to see it- we need to see what the change of our culture can look like!

We need to have hope-

***I'm going to tell you three stories that have given me real joy**

and a glimpse into what our future can look like:

You may have seen this picture in the paper a couple of weeks ago-

The picture showed the base of the Robert E. Lee monument- covered in graffiti-

defaced as much as some of the protesters could make it-

On one of the raised steps on the base of the monument

stood two young black women- teenagers-

(Ava Holloway, Kennedy George)

They wore ballet costumes- tutus- they were standing en pointe

with their arms raised-

The image they portrayed was not anger- not rage-

Those young girls radiated grace- poise - serenity- and most especially

a dignity that was far beyond their years- and a deep joy!

I could only admire them –

I thought- those young women are the leaders of tomorrow-

and we are safe with them.

The second story I will tell is also something you may have seen on television-

It also happened a couple of weeks ago.

A young man, (Hamed Barbarji) a recent VCU graduate,

went down to the J.E.B. Stuart monument- he took his trumpet-

I don't know a thing about him- but he sat on one of the steps of the

(also griffitti covered) statue- and he played-

“It's a Wonderful World.”

“I see trees of green, red roses, too I see them bloom for me and you

And I think to myself What a wonderful world.

I see skies of blue and clouds of white,

The bright blessed days, the dark sacred nights.

And I think to myself, What a wonderful world.

The colors of the rainbow, -so pretty in the sky

Are also on the faces of people going by.

I see friends shaking hands, saying how do you do

They're really saying I love you

**I hear babies cry, I watch them grow, They'll learn much more- than I'll ever know.
And I think to myself What a wonderful world
Yes, I think to myself What a wonderful world."**

**That young man who played his trumpet in the middle of the signs of confusion
and unrest- was telling us that he had hope-
that he could see a future in which his song would define us-
And I thought "This young man is a leader of tomorrow for us- I feel safe with him."**

**The third story is about one of our own clergy in the Diocese of Southern Virginia-
A few weeks ago, our new Bishop, Bishop Susan Haynes,
invited the retired clergy to a "Virtual Luncheon with the Bishop"-
which meant that you made your own peanut butter sandwich-
and you went online on Zoom and,
along with the other retired clergy who were there,
you ate your peanut butter sandwich and they ate theirs.**

**One of the retired priests who were there was Joe Greene,
a black priest from Norfolk-
Joe is highly respected and very well know in this diocese-
he's been active in civil rights issues for many years-
at one time he was vice- mayor of Norfolk
in addition to his parish responsibilities.**

**As we were nearing the end of our conversation
Joe spoke up and said "Well- what do you all think of what's going on?"
We said we thought things were moving in a good direction-
but that mostly we hadn't done enough-
And Joe said "Well, I'm 94- and I really can't march anymore-**

I can't walk that well- but- FOR THE FIRST TIME- I HAVE HOPE!"

**This holy man- 94 years of age- who has worked for civil rights -for equality
all his life- for the first time - sees hope!**

It reminds me of Martin Luther King's "I've been to the mountaintop" speech.

**He said "I've been to the mountaintop and I've looked over
into the promised land."**

**Dr. King said he might not get there but that he'd seen the promised land
and he knew the people would get there one day.**

**I don't know how long it will take for us to reach a land with peace and justice-
but I've seen glimpses of it in the faces of young people-
and in the words of a elderly holy priest .**

I may not get there, but I know it exists.

**There is hope- the signs of it are all around us- look for them-
but- most importantly of all-
never, never,never forget that it is God who leads us.**

Amen.