

“The Kings’ Dances”

Rev. Ken McGarry at The First Church in Stoneham, Massachusetts

July 14, 2024 - Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

[2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19; Mark 6:14-29](#)

For today’s sermon, I would like to speak about our response to the events of yesterday, when a would-be assassin’s bullet pierced the ear of former President Donald Trump as he spoke at a rally in Pennsylvania. Fortunately, he was not physically harmed beyond this and is now recovering in one of his homes after being released from a hospital. Sadly, however, one other rally-goer was killed and two others were critically wounded before the gunman was himself killed by a Secret Service response team. We pray for God’s healing presence to be with those who were injured, we pray for God to comfort the family of the man who was killed, and we pray for God’s peace to be with all of us in this nation, that this terrible act of violence would not lead to further violence, and that, as a people, we would not move further down the dark path of acting violently in response to our political differences or any other disagreements or diversity in thought or way of life, but would instead take a different road that leads to us all living together in peace.

This path that leads to peace is the one that Jesus took during his lifetime, even though his own earthly days were ended with an act of brutal violence by those who considered him to be a threat to their own power. In this he followed his kinsman John the baptizer, who, as we heard moments ago, was also jailed and killed by those who considered him and his message to threaten their own political power, and they followed many of the other prophets of Israel, whose voices were likewise silenced through violent acts.

The silencing of others’ opposing voices through violence is story told over and over throughout our scriptures, from the first chapters of Genesis, which tells of Cain slaying his brother Abel, to the final pages of the Revelation, which uses imagery to depict the brutal Roman persecution of Christians. In all of these stories, we are offered not examples for how we ought to be as people, growing our own power over others through violence, but depictions of how humans have gone far, far away from the ideal way of the Garden, where God and people dwelled together in peace, that, instead, we have gone far down the road of

brutal violence against one another and our loving Creator that leads to only to more destruction and death.

Throughout our scriptures, we are also offered an alternative to this brutal way of the world. Time and time again, we are taught through the stories and lessons of the Bible that there is a better way that leads away from darkness, death, and destruction and heads instead towards more light and life. We are shown that this better way to live is in love for one another, and we are taught that the best society is the one in which people lovingly dignify and respect one another, dealing with each other courteously and with civility. If we can work together to create this kind of just society, here and as a global community, we will be blessed with more of God's peace.

If we can faithfully live out the commandments of God, loving God and loving our neighbors as ourselves, we will welcome in more of God's healing presence in our lives, and we can break out into all kinds of joyous dances, just as David did when the teachings and presence of God came near. As a Pentecost people, who celebrate God's holy presence being not just near, but dwelling within each of us, making us a holy temple of God's Spirit, we can offer our own unique, lively dance every moment of every day as a gift to God and to those around us. In this God would be pleased and others would be blessed.

Today, let us respond to the events of our world with grace, giving as David did, not taking as Herod and his family did. Let us always be grieved by violence in our world and pray for all those who are the victims of violence, even those we dislike or with whom we disagree. Let us never seek to repay acts of violence with retribution in-kind. Instead of being frozen by fear of our nation spiraling ever downward to a violent, chaotic abyss, let us become more dedicated to actively offering our own contribution to the changing of our course through our own loving speech and action. Choosing to live in love is something we can control in this world, in which so much seems out of control, so let us choose again and again and again the path of love that leads to more life and peace for us, those we love, our nation, and the whole world. Amen.