

We have certainly been exposed to some horrific images this week. First we were exposed to the horrific images of the finish line of the Boston Marathon when two bombs exploded killing three innocent victims and wounding hundreds of others. We have heard the stories of the victims and have felt pain in our hearts for their families.

Then we were exposed to the horrific explosion of a plant in Texas resulting in the death of many neighbors and numerous buildings flattened. President Obama and a congressman received poisoned letters. Then on Thursday evening and Friday we heard the stories of a massive manhunt in the Boston area for the two perpetrators of violence and more victims.

Congressional debates about gun control. Some of our school children in the Clover area were subject to a lockdown one day this week as a person was sought who had offered threats against a school in another county.

It is easy to allow all of this death and destruction and violence to become overwhelming. But sometimes death hits much closer to home. Like when a good and loving and caring friend dies much too early. That friend who gives of herself unselfishly for others. That friend who unselfishly uses her hands to make creative and useful items for others. That friend who serves God and others and is the one that so many depend upon. That type of friend is the person that we are about to read about in the New Testament book of Acts.

We will hear that her name is Tabitha in Aramaic or Dorcas in the Greek language. We are told that she has two names because in both languages her name means "gazelle." What a wonderful name. Gazelle in Arabic was a symbol of feminine beauty.

Tabitha will also be described as a disciple in our story. That is unique because this is the only instance in the New Testament when a woman is described as a disciple. Leads one to wonder why she is never included in the list of disciples that we think about today. But I guess the prejudices of the day could not be overcome even for someone so devoted to Jesus.

Read Acts 9:36-43

This story begins in Joppa. The same community where the story of Jonah begins. Jonah is called out of Joppa to go and share the good news in Nineveh but he becomes distracted from his task and ends up in the belly of a big fish. In our story in Joppa, Tabitha is a well liked woman. Devoted to good works and acts of charity we are told. But Tabitha becomes ill and dies. Once again, death claims someone so innocent.

We are told that the other disciples then hear that the Apostle Peter is in a nearby town and they ask for him to come and see Tabitha. These disciples who reach out to Peter do not believe that death is the final word. When Peter is asked to come Peter immediately comes. Peter arrives and finds a scene where several women are crying outside the room where Tabitha's body has been placed. These women are even wearing clothes made by their friend Tabitha.

Tabitha is one of those women that made a huge impact in the time that she lived on earth. She was praised and at her death true grief was expressed. Sometimes people were paid to be mourners. But not in Tabitha's case. Only people who were really grieving show up for her.

Peter arrives. Peter comes to represent the presence of Christ. And in Christ, death is not the final word. Peter kneels down and prays beside the dead Tabitha. But then Tabitha opens her eyes. Peter invites her to sit up. Once again, death is not the final word.

Now we don't know how long Tabitha lived after this miracle. Eventually she does die. She is not immortal. But Luke records this story in Acts to give us another example of how death, and violence, and destruction is not the final word. Life and resurrection always overcomes death in the kingdom of God.

We have seen lots of death and destruction and violence this week. Maybe you have watched the accounts in Boston or Texas and wondered how this could happen in a world that God loves. Maybe you have also encountered a death in your family or maybe you are dealing with the death of someone close to you. Maybe you are grieving something that is a loss to you. Maybe you are seeing death or violence and wondering if the final word is indeed death.

But Luke's story in Acts gives us a witness to something that is stronger than death. God's love and care and justice is always stronger than death.

It is easy to look at the events in Boston and in Texas and become discouraged. Such a sad story in Boston of young and intelligent young men who felt the need to carry out atrocious acts. But every day in our society intelligent people do some violent and destructive things to themselves and to others. And when we see violence carried out it is easy to assume that death and destruction and violence is the final word.

But it is not. Christ has the final word. And the final word with Christ is not death but resurrection. Later in the service we will be invited around a table of Holy Communion. Holy Communion is a symbol of life over death.

As this country mourns the death of the innocent and seeks justice for the wrongdoer, I believe that we will also find ways to celebrate resurrection.

When we celebrate violence, we celebrate something which is not of Christ. When we seek and celebrate resurrection, then we celebrate the power of Christ.
AMEN.

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-Given: April 21, 2013 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)

Prayer of Confession:

Shepherding God, You are the one who leads us into life. In the wake of the terrible acts of cruelty and horror in Boston, lead us away from fear and revenge and instead to the still waters and green pastures of love, grace, and peace. Guide, and guard, our hearts so that we might not react out of anger and hatred but out of love for humanity that comes from your love. Lead us in the paths of righteousness and justice for Your name's sake.

Even though we walk through the darkness of bombings, of shootings, of war in our world—the shadow of death looms near—do not let fear overtake us. Guide us to not fear evil in this world, for You are with us as a shepherd is with his sheep. Comfort us as a mother comforts a hurt child. Show us the way through these dark days. We offer these prayers today.

Prayers of the People

For the peace from above, for the loving kindness of God, and for our salvation, *let us pray to the Lord.*

For the peace of the world, for the unity of people across cultural boundaries and national borders, and for the well being of all peoples, *let us pray to the Lord.*

For those who mourn the dead in Boston and Texas, *let us pray to the Lord.*

For those who carry out violence against others including those who seek forgiveness and those who could care less, *let us pray to the Lord.*

For those of us here who gather in worship, *let us pray to the Lord.*

For our elected officials and for first responders, medical personnel, and firefighters and police, *let us pray to the Lord.*

Lord, for the following prayers offered from this body, we pray for

Lord's Prayer.