

We approach the next scripture with the stains of another act of extreme violence in our country. This time it's a school shooting in Parkland, Florida where 17 students and teachers were killed by a 19-year-old young man with anger issues and a semi-automatic weapon.

Today's scripture was chosen by me before the school shooting, but it is a text which has a lot to say to us during this current situation. It is the story of Noah and the ark.

For many of us, the story of Noah and the ark is a classic children's story. There are many church nurseries with murals of a boat, cute animals in pairs, and a pretty rainbow. Many teenagers and adults consider this a story that doesn't really translate to the real world because of this fairy tale depiction. But if we read this story closely we find that it says a lot to our world where violence seems to be so prevalent.

The story we are about to read is found very early in the Bible. The Bible begins in the book of Genesis with stories of creation. Sadly, the first parents, Adam and Eve, must deal with the murder of one son at the hands of their other son. Domestic violence is found in the first family in the Bible.

And it doesn't get much better from there. The scriptures say that God becomes displeased with the wickedness of humankind and decides to blot them out. But there is one person who finds favor with God. We are not told why God finds favor with Noah.

God decides that the world is corrupt, and God chooses to protect a remnant. That remnant becomes Noah and his family and the animals that they round up into the ark two by two and seven by seven.

Many of us know the general outline of this story. God is displeased with humankind and sends rain for 40 days and nights. Noah is guided to build an ark to house one pair of every kind of animal and 7 pairs of every kind of clean animal.

The ark survives the floods and after being in the boat for 10 months Noah opens a window and sends out a raven. The raven returns. Noah then sends out a dove which also returns. Noah waits 7 more days and sends out the dove again.

This time the dove returns with an olive branch in its beak signaling that there is dry land nearby. The dove is sent out 7 days later and does not return signaling that their journey is about to end.

At the end of this story we have God choosing to put limits on God's self and declare a symbol of a rainbow to remind everyone of how God limits God's actions. God chooses to not do this again.

Read Genesis 9:8-17

Like this story in Genesis, we have come face to face with another situation of violence in our country. This time a school shooting in Florida. And whenever there is an act of violence I can easily predict which friends and family members will bring up which argument on Facebook.

I can group my Facebook friends into 3 categories. I can predict who will be in which category. One group will quickly site the statistics that show how many homicides are committed in the US verses other countries. They will highlight how many mass shootings are carried out by semi-automatic weapons.

The second group of Facebook friends quickly come to the defense of private ownership of guns and our rights as US citizens to bear arms. The third group of Facebook friends go the spirituality route and point out that it is really a situation of human sin.

The thing is. All three of these groups make valid points. But events like this happen and we yell and scream at one another rather than seek to come together to find solutions to prevent this type of violence from happening again.

One post that has become popular on Facebook is a whiteboard in which a person has posted a circle which recognizes **mass shooting** leads to **thoughts and prayers** which leads to **Facebook debates** which leads to **everyone forgetting** which leads to **Congress doing nothing** which leads to **quiet around the subject** which leads to **mass shooting** and we begin the cycle all over again.

And there will be a day in our near future when we will begin this cycle all over again. And this leads us to feeling hopeless and helpless.

I will be honest and say that my own views on this subject are influenced by growing up in a home where there were guns in the house. Recently I found myself at a shooting range with a 20-gauge shotgun cleanly hitting clay pigeons. I was quite proud of my accomplishments down in Chester County.

My first gun was the 20-gauge shotgun that my Daddy used to teach me how to shoot a tin can sitting on a fence post. Or should I say how to miss shooting at a tin can sitting on a fence post. When I was a teenager, that 20-gauge shotgun sat in the corner of my bedroom at the end of the hallway in my parent's house.

That gun sat there until the day that a 7-year-old child came over to play. The child scampered down the hallway to play in my room while my mother did other responsibilities in the house. Later this child appeared in the kitchen pointing this 20-gauge shotgun at my momma. It was not loaded but there were shells in a drawer in my room.

That was the day that gun control entered my parent's home and I learned something about limiting access to weapons to protect children. This gun and its bullets were removed from my bedroom and placed in a secure location. Any responsible gun owner practices gun control in their own home.

This text from Genesis that we read is a text about the very real presence of violence in the world. Violence that displeases God. But God chooses to respond to this violence in the world by choosing one extended family to take care of what is important. And what is important to God in this story is to take care of the family and to take care of God's creatures.

So maybe that is what we can take away from this scripture today. Rather than being overwhelmed by the violence, we can imagine that because of violence we have been called by God to protect the family and to protect God's creation.

Our responsibility is to focus our energies on whatever we can do to protect the family and to protect the creation. Our responsibility is to encourage our elected officials to pass laws that protect the family, especially children, and that protect the creation. We must ask ourselves as a culture if semi-automatic weapons protect the family and protect the creation.

We will have differences of opinion on what it means to protect the family and protect the creation. But we need to learn to listen and support one another and remind one another that we are called to be faithful to God as we live in this ark together.

Rather than allowing the violence around us to sink us into name calling and becoming defensive, we can instead cross over those boundaries to work together to find solutions that protect families and protect the creation.

Violence is real in our world. It was real for Adam and Eve when their one son killed their other son. The first family described in the Bible included a murderer and an innocent victim of domestic violence. Think about that for a few seconds.

The first family described in the Bible included a murderer and an innocent victim of domestic violence. Domestic violence is an unfortunate part of who we are and a sign of our human sinfulness and depravity.

But God is seeking out people willing to find ways to work together to come up with solutions that help the family and that help God's creation.

Do we want to be part of the problem and demonize others who espouse different opinions?

Or do we want to find ways to work together and to be part of the solution?

AMEN.

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