

## Yet Again – Why?

### Year B, Proper 27 – Hebrews 10:11-25

*preached by the Rector at St. Paul's, Henderson, November 15, 2015 (after Paris)*

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

Earlier this week, before heading off to Louisville to be part of the annual Convention of the Diocese of Kentucky, I was all set to preach on this morning's reading from Hebrews. But then a band of madmen, armed with automatic weapons and strapped with explosives, bent on sowing as many seeds of terror as they could before offering up their own lives on some perverse altar of hatred, walked into a Paris concert hall and stadium and a staccato string of sites across the for now inappropriately named City of Lights. Having been separated from my usual steady stream of information, on the road and then in workshops on evangelism and stewardship, I only heard about this particular terror in the streets when the Bishop called us to prayer for Paris as part of our Diocesan celebration of the Eucharist. In time for the nightly news, as my day was ending and the rising toll of victims were facing a new and tragic dawn, we *all* knew much more about what had happened than we ever *wanted* to know. But even then, even *now*, yet once *again*, we really don't know the answer to the one question we really want answered. Yet again, yet *again*, we ask, "Why?"

And I'm stuck, because yet again, after skyscrapers, and theaters, and colleges, and prayer meetings, and kindergartens, yet *again*, I've got to admit that I just don't *know* why.

I suppose, in some ways, I *should* know. I've been learning how to talk about God since before I could talk. I suppose I *should* know. I've been to seminary and I've been ordained by the Church to be able to talk about God. I suppose I *should* know. Yet again, what in the world do you pay me for, anyway? I suppose I could at least *pretend* to know. But in the face of violence in the service of political or even some twisted *religious* aims, yet again I have to confess that I simply don't *know* why.

I don't know why 129 people who simply showed up for a ball game, or a concert, or a cup of *coffee* Friday evening, will never see or be seen by their families again. I don't know why eight young men would harbor enough hate in their hearts, enough brokenness in their souls, to trade their longing for justice and their passion for God, for bullets and bombs, for bloodshed and butchery against people they had never even met.

I don't know why there's seemingly random suffering in this world. I don't know why there's pain. I don't know why death always comes too soon to those we love. I don't know why faithful, loving people fall victim to accident or disease, while some who spit hatred and injustice seem to live on in comfort and ease. I don't know why our pain is just as intense whether our loss is sudden, or our loved one suffers achingly long. I don't know why we are willing to hurt total strangers – or why we so often do the same thing to the ones we hold closest.

I don't know why shootings in the stadiums and cafés of Paris splash across our headlines and our newsfeeds, while this same week, bombings in Beirut and Baghdad passed by with barely a whisper.

I don't know why some of us are able hold our loved ones tight as we try to make sense of a world of madmen and guns and hatred and violence. I don't know why others hear this news and ache for those grown away from them in conflict or cold indifference. I don't know why others have had their loved but taken too soon from their arms. I don't know why others have only loved ones of hopes and dreams, but never born.

I don't know why pain. I don't know why suffering. I don't know why loss. When it comes right down to it, cradle Christian, Bible-reading, seminary trained professional though I

am, in the face of such seemingly senseless brutality, yet again I am forced to admit that there are a whole *lotta* things that I just don't know.

But, dear friends, there are a *few* things that I *do* know!

I *know* that the world we live in is *not* the world that God created. Scripture tells us that in the beginning, when God called something, *everything* out of the nothing, he looked at it and he pronounced it "good." From darkness, *he* called light. From chaos, *he* brought order. From mere dust, he spoke life and breathed into the human heart the image of his own being. But whether or not you believe Genesis to be literal fact – as a matter of fact, whether or not you believe *anything* about Scripture – you and I have to admit that the goodness that God created, is *not* the world in which you and I live. But the world in which madmen shoot and innocents are cut down unaware, was *not* shaped by God's hands – it was shaped by human pride. Even through our violence-blurred eyes, it's easy enough to see that through *our* hatreds and *our* prejudices, through *our* pride and *our* selfishness, through *our* paltry thieving, and *our* petty back-biting, and *our* failure to love as we ourselves have been loved, *we* have bent and distorted and perverted God's dream for a universe of love, into the pathetic, twisted nightmare it so often is, the nightmare of our own making.

Even now, even yet again, I *know* that the God I find in Scriptures is not some aloof, uncaring puppet-master. I know that he is the one who defines himself as the woman searching for even the tiniest fragment of what belongs to her. I know that he is the one who calls himself the shepherd who leaves all he has to search out the one sheep that is constantly straying away. I know that he is the one who waits as a longing father for the return of his lost child. Yet again, I *know* that the God who lived for us and died for us and *rose* for us, loves each and every one of us too much to *cause* our pain. I *know* that he loves us too much to contribute to our suffering. I *know* that he loves us too much to twist our lives or use our sorrow to manipulate us into behaving like good little children. And I know just as certainly that he wants *our* love too much to steal from us our freedom to love him and one another, the same freedom that lets us time and time again turn our backs on each other – and on him.

My friends, let me tell you *yet again*, that though there are a good many things that I do *not* know, I *know* that murder and terror will *not* stand. I may not know much, but I *know* that grief and suffering and death will *never* be the final word. Because, though yet again I may not know why, I *do* know *who*.

I *know* who stood in the face of wrong, and spoke right. I *know* who stood in the face of violence, and spoke peace. I *know* who stood at the very apex of cruelty and hatred and despair, and spoke love, and spoke love, and spoke love. I know that even in the nightmare that yet again we have seen in Paris, and in Beirut, and in Bagdad, with the author to the Hebrews, we can "hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering," because he who has promised... is *always* faithful. And then with this witness, and with those through nightmare *ages* of violence have yet kept God's dream alive, "let us consider how to provoke one another to love, and to good deeds... encouraging one another." "And all the more," our author says, as yet again, we see the Day of the fulfilment of the Dream of God's Kingdom approaching ever nearer.