

*This? . . . is Good News!*

Church of the Advent, Sunday, Oct 2, 2011

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*Context speaks to text, for me this week.*

CONTEXT

- Diocesan initiative in association with the International Red Cross
  - *Ten Steps To Creating Safe Environments*
- Key messages
  - Violence touches everyone, it is a global humanitarian catastrophe that affects all continents, countries and communities
  - Violence is preventable
  - organizations, including churches, have an important responsibility to prevent, reduce, mitigate and respond to violence
- Front of Bulletin: *The Church of the Advent though the Anglican Diocese of BC is committed to creating and maintaining a safe community in every respect including our ministry with vulnerable persons such as children, seniors and persons with special challenges*
  - We have already taken some steps here at COTA - it is time to go further
  - SHOCK: something like 46% of Canadians indicates in surveys that churches are not safe communities
  - So imagine my concern when I look at this week's Gospel

TEXT

- violent imagery throughout
- yes, I understand the reasons:
  - a metaphorical explanation of how Matthew's Jewish associates responded to the Good News of Jesus Christ - they (the Jews of that particular day and that particular time) sent him to the Romans for execution because of Jesus' threat to their status quo
- How to use such a text in a positive way
- Some help in the following meditation by Robert J. Miller, adapted by kjg from Fire in the Deep: lection Divine Series, Cycle A

"They seized him, dragged him outside the vineyard, and killed him" (Matthew 21:39).

If the human race can be said  
to have a dark side,  
its propensity for violence

must be it.

Despite humanity's amazing achievements  
in science, health, commerce,  
and information delivery systems,  
daily news reports  
still glaringly remind us of  
our primal proclivity  
for cruelty and violence.

Rape, murder, and robbery.  
Physical abuse, domestic violence.  
War, genocide, terrorism.  
Gangs, drugs, "turf warfare."  
Racism, prejudice, bigotry.

It seems the more civilized  
we become, the more insane  
our savagery becomes.

Even the Bible cannot escape  
the brutality humans are capable of.  
The Prince of Peace himself,  
the One who healed the sick,  
raised the dead,  
brought hope to thousands,  
was a victim of violence.

"The light came into the world,  
but people loved darkness  
rather than light  
because their deeds were wicked'.(John 3:19).

Matthew today speaks of men  
callous, cold, greedy,  
narrow-minded in their violence  
against the vineyard owner.  
It is a story all too familiar  
to us today.

This propensity for violence  
is equally demonstrated  
in our baptismal promise,  
where candidates and sponsors  
are asked an important question

Do you renounce  
the evil powers of this world,  
which corrupt and destroy  
the creatures of God?

But thanks to our amazing Creator  
(who knows us better  
than we know ourselves),  
there is an exit  
out of the slippery slope of violence.

This "dark side" of humanity  
finds redemption in  
choosing Life and not death.

"Choose this day who you will serve" (Joshua 24:15).

The dark urges rising up in humans  
are transformed and healed  
only in the Life God gives,  
only by the Power available  
from a world beyond this one.

God alone moves  
our stubborn and fearful natures  
beyond human weakness,  
inherent sinful passions,  
dark energies,  
into new horizons of  
restoration, resolution, hope, and life.

"Live according to what  
you have heard me say  
and seen me do.  
Then will the God of peace  
be with you" (Philippians 4:9).

Halting violence begins  
with your personal choices.  
Make a personal life-commitment  
to help stop the violence  
rampant in society.

Choose to resist  
those dark human impulses  
that enslave

and oppress so many.

Choose actions  
that promote Life,  
that arbitrate  
not alienate.

Witness to the world  
by your own life-actions--  
that "all those who draw the sword  
will die by the sword" (Matthew 26:47).

Become an evangelist  
of Life and Truth,  
reminding all who will listen  
to "seek first the Kingdom of God,  
and all other things  
will be given you besides" (Matthew 6:33).

Guide others into the deep Wisdom that  
"thoughts should be directed  
towards all that is true,  
honest, pure, admirable,  
decent, virtuous, or worthy of praise" (Philippians 4:7).