

Rev. Christa von Zychlin
St. Luke ABQ May 29, 2022 Easter 7

A Striking Witness

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| 1. Uziyah Garcia | 13. Makenna Lee Elrod |
| 2. Amerie Jo Garza | 14. Lexi Rubio |
| 3. Xavier Lopez | 15. Maite (MY TÉ) Rodriguez |
| 4. Tess Marie Mata | 16. Jayce Carmelo -c Luevanos
(HI-Se) |
| 5. Rojelio [row HED io] Torres | 17. Ellie Garcia |
| 6. Jose Flores | 18. Layla Salazar |
| 7. Jailha [JAY -E -ah] Silguero - c | 19. Maranda Mathis |
| 8. Alithia Ramirez | And two dedicated teachers: |
| 9. Nevaeh Bravo [nevah-A] | 20. Eva Mireles, Teacher |
| 10. Jackie Cazares © | 21. Irma Garcia, Teacher |
| 11. Annabelle Rodriguez © | |
| 12. Eliahana Torres | |

Photos of the children show
 AB Honor roll
 Game Day tshirt
 Shyly smiling
 One pictured on her First communion
 Baseball uniform
 Trophies

budding artists, musicians, Tik-tok video producers.

Two sets of cousins, so two families are mourning two children each. How can you make room for two times an infinity of pain? The mathematics of grief – can't calculate it.

Most had big brown eyes, brown or black hair, although there were a blonde and even a redhead among them. Evil doesn't *always* discriminate.

God-given children.

Mowed down by a - nihilist killer.

Nihilist -- a person - who believes that life is meaningless and rejects all religious and moral principles:

(I looked it up)

How do we make sense, where there is no sense? How do we keep ONE nihilist from turning us ALL into nihilists. People - who believe that life is meaningless and reject all religious and moral principles:

YET - *faith*, the Christian Faith is so evident in photos of the aftermath. A man kneeling in church by a stained-glass window picturing the Lamb of God.

Innocent blood of the lamb witnesses to the innocent blood of children.

Another photo of a Catholic mass with celebrants dressed in white. A large crucifix front & center.

Even though I'm a Lutheran there are times when only a crucifix can speak to the unspeakable, and maybe the bloodier the image the better and more honest the witness. Jesus experienced the *worst* humans can do to each other and the Christian Church at Her best has been *assiduous*... unrelentingly attentive, earnest, persistent, honest, about naming evil: evil of trusting in the power of violence. The evil of believing I am god and I make my own decisions about what's right and wrong,

The political left says: Get rid of those guns, that's the solution.

How naïve.

The political right says: Personal responsibility & FATHERS in the home and armed guards will solve this mess.

How naïve.

The Lutheran Christian tradition says both and more,

The left is right - There need to be laws – including well formulated gun laws to rein in evil. First use of the law, for those of you who want to look it up in thick Lutheran theology books.

The right is right - There needs to be personal responsibility starting in the home... And Fathers [&uncles and grandpas matter,] - it's not an accident that Jesus names God as Father (- there's feminine and non-gendered names for God in the scriptures too, but I think *because* of so many absent fathers in so *many* cultures, there's a reason Jesus names God as the Father who is present and caring and active. And siblings, grandparents, god-parents, co-workers, neighbors, the fabric of community, it all matters --

The *assiduousness* of churches, synagogues, temples and mosques matters. The persistent teaching of basic morality and not just rights but responsibilities for one another – all our faith traditions teach this, and it matters.

...

And ALSO there is this Jesus way of love even where there's violence & death.

In Acts chapter 16 -
Silas & Paul –

rescue a slave girl

with a “python spirit” –which enabled her to tell fortunes, –

This slave girl was making a tidy profit for her owners, who didn't appreciate it when Paul, suddenly turns and says, “*in the name of Jesus Christ, Get out of her.*”

And the python spirit slithers away, and with it, the big money --

So, those slave owners have Paul & Silas arrested for 1) being Jews... the *wrong* ethnicity & religion and 2) “anti-government activity.” Anti-establishment. (*and maybe worst of all*) Anti-business. ///

Paul & Silas are beaten, sentenced without a trial, (as foreigners they have no rights,) imprisoned, legs put in stocks - can't move, in pain, scared -

And how do Paul & Silas react?

16:25 They sang and prayed. And the other prisoners watched, amazed.

my mom always told of being a teenager in the basement shelters during the fire-bombing of Hamburg Germany, 1943, during Operation Gomorrah, where British and American bombers killed tens of thousands of innocent civilians, and

my mom remembered what a grace it was, when a few strong voices, started to sing Johann Sebastian Bach's famous motet, *Fürchte dich nicht* –*be not afraid for your God has called you by name...*

It was a miracle, that my mother survived.

I so wish a miracle had happened for those 19 children and two teachers in Texas.

Sometimes miracles do happen... as Paul & Silas are singing, an earthquake breaks their chains and opens the prison doors.

Their first thought must have been to just get the heck out of there... but then another miracle? They *notice* what's happening with their jailer—
A moment of *nihilism* – as if nothing matters – he's about to commit suicide.

You see, Roman Law said that the guard on duty during a prison escape, earthquake or no earthquake, the reason doesn't matter – must pay with his own life, and maybe face beating and torture first.

So In the jailor's mind – better to just end it himself

But Paul sees and intervenes,
Don't hurt yourself! We're all here! None of your prisoners has gone.

The jailer can't imagine what kind of a power would keep men who could escape... hang around so they can save their own jailer.

St. Francis of Assisi is attributed with saying
Preach the gospel at all times... if necessary use words.

Now the time for using words had come.

Hold on the lord Jesus Christ, say Paul & Silas, and you'll be saved, you and your whole household.

There's a God who cares and knows you by name.

And right then and there, while it's still night the jailer and his whole family are baptized,

and they got out food and had themselves one heck of a party, jailor and freed prisoners, together.

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How do 21st century Christians living in these violent times, how do we authentically witness the way of Jesus?

Here are three ways I see from Acts 16:

1) We notice and speak out against evil – the python spirits of this world have to be named and denounced, whether it’s hateful treatment of “foreigners”, or lies told in order to make money, or “just” the spirit of nihilism that says TAKE A LIFE - nothing matters anyway.

EVIL We speak out against it.

2) we witness by how we react to the brutality of our world - we take time and breath to name those 19 beautiful children and two teachers, we assiduously pray & sing to remember, and remind others, we have a God who knows us by name, who says the time for justice and life and dancing is still ahead.

3) we witness by taking action to firm up laws to restrain evil, to notice people in trouble. To step forward to make a difference.

And when the time is right, we aren’t afraid to witness with words, either.

There is a God who is as close as a Good Father,
who’s own innocent child hung & bled to death on a cross,

whose own resurrection from that stone cold tomb means that

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will live in the presence of God forever.

Amen..