

Rev. Laura Blazek – Christ the King, John 18, 33-37 – November 22

Thanksgiving almost seems to have become a lost holiday. Remember when each holiday had its own month? October belonged to Halloween. December belonged to Christmas and November belonged to Thanksgiving Day. But in our eagerness to get to Christmas, we jump right over Thanksgiving anymore.

That wasn't the case when I was growing up. Thanksgiving for me meant a family gathering-grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins and eventually second cousins. We came together, each family contributing their specialty dish to the meal, like Mimi's homemade pecan pie. The menu never really varied until one of my older cousins would marry and their very brave spouse would bring some new-fangled dish that we all eyed with suspicion only to proclaim it a 'it's not Thanksgiving without' dish.

We would eat our fill. Swap stories. Rest. Eat some more and then settle down to play Charades. It was the one family gathering where our joy revolved around simply being together and breaking bread with those we love.

Today's gospel reading puts us at the end of Holy Week. Talk about jumping holidays. But, as I reflected on this week's Gospel reading which finds Jesus standing before Pilate in the wee hours of the morning on Friday, I kept looking at the meal Jesus had come from and where He was going. The more I looked, the more I thought about Holy Week and how, like Thanksgiving, it is becoming lost as we all want to jump straight to Easter and avoid all that ugliness in between. We want the benefit of Christ's sacrifice without the work, because following Christ means making choices that separate us from the world while still living in it. My thoughts continued to bounce back and forth between Holy Week and Thanksgiving week, like some kind of weird tennis match or perhaps more like Pilate, who found himself bouncing between the world outside and Jesus.

On Thanksgiving Thursday, we gather together to break bread with family and friends. We will give thanks, eat, and share our lives with one another. After having given thanks for all the gifts in our lives, for all the blessings bestowed upon us, some of us begin to grumble and complain about the things we don't have. We want more, nay, we demand more, and by jove, we are going to get it because it says right there in the ad "lowest price of the season". Pretty soon, Uncle Joe sneaks off to go to Wal-Mart, they opened at 6 p.m. after all and he is already late, to go find a better deal than the one life has given him. Everyone else continues to hang around to just talk and listen. The men, bellies full of a satisfying meal, then all promptly fall asleep; their promise to help in the kitchen unfulfilled.

It sounds a lot like Maundy Thursday to me.

And then comes Black Friday, the biggest, and for many, the best shopping day of the year. I see Black Friday as a day of sadness. The world tells us to 'shop til we drop', that our worth is based on what we own and the presents we give, that the more expensive the present the more love we will receive in return. The crowds gather; excitement builds to a frenzy waiting for the doors to open. And just hours after giving thanks for all we have, people will push, shove, claw,

and trample over one other to get that one thing that they are sure will bring fulfillment, only to find that it doesn't; so they will try again next year.

In Holy Week, Good Friday comes next, but the color is black because while it was necessary it was a day of sadness. The crowds gathered, whipped into a frenzy, and then were presented with a choice- Barabbas or Jesus? Peter denies knowing the Lord he loves three times. The disciples disappear and cower in fear of their lives.

Both Black Friday and Good Friday are a day of choosing. Do we choose Barabbas and the world that tells us to fear, to hate, that we can't be loved for who we are, or do we choose Jesus who loves us as we are, tells us love is stronger than hate and to be not afraid. Will we allow our fear to motivate us? Will we choose to shout, "Crucify Him!" or will we stand beside Jesus and walk the way of the cross?

When we blindly follow the crowd, when we give into our hate and fear, when we trample over others in our egotistical obsession with self, we have nailed Jesus to the cross just as assuredly as they did over 2000 years ago. Our words and actions may not be so blunt or harsh but the end result is the same. We cry, "Crucify Him!" We cower in fear and turn our backs on the Lord we love.

It isn't just on Black Friday that we are faced with this choice. It is each and every waking moment of our lives. Do we let our fears drive us, let us others latch onto our fears as a way to control us, or do we give our fears over to God? Do we find rest and consolation in the peace that Jesus brings? Can we believe that we are loved as we are, that we are enough because we are God's child? Can we have faith Jesus is the truth and that by living His words to "love our neighbors as ourselves" we will find more joy and happiness than we can ever find in a store? Do we let the words, "Be not afraid," fill our hearts so that we can find the courage to reach out with love rather than hate?

Our new presiding Bishop Michael Curry has written an address on the Syrian refugee crisis that our own Bishop Edward has asked us to all prayerfully consider. Bishop Curry writes:

**Episcopal Presiding Bishop Michael Curry Addresses
Syrian Refugee Crisis:
"Be not afraid!"**

Episcopal Church Presiding Bishop and Primate Michael B. Curry addresses the current Syrian refugee crisis:

"Be not afraid!"

Often in the gospels, fear grips the people of God, and time and again, either the angels, or Our Lord himself, respond with the same words of comfort: "Be not afraid."

In times like this fear is real. And I share that fear with you. Our instinct tells us to be afraid. The fight-or-flight mentality takes hold. At the present moment, many across our Church and our world are grasped by fear in response to the terrorist attacks that unfolded in Paris last Friday. These fears are not unfounded. We can and should support law enforcement officials who are working hard and at great risk to protect us from crime and keep us safe. And yet, especially when we feel legitimate fear, our faith reminds us "Be not afraid." The larger truth is that our ultimate security comes from God in Christ.

In the Book of Leviticus, God says to the people of Israel that, "the foreigner who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the foreigner as yourself, for you were foreigners in the land of Egypt." Accordingly, we welcome the stranger. We love our neighbor. The Episcopal Church has long been committed to resettling refugees in our own communities fleeing violence and persecution.

The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society, through its Episcopal Migration Ministries service, works with dioceses and congregations, and the United States government, to settle refugees in communities across this great country. The Episcopal Church has been engaged in this ministry for more than 75 years. We will not let the nightmare this world often is keep us from carrying out the words of Jesus who told us to be a neighbor to those in need.

Refugees from places like Syria seek to escape the precise same ideological and religious extremism that gave birth to the attacks in Paris. They seek entry into our communities because their lives are imprisoned by daily fear for their existence. Just as Jesus bids us not to be afraid, we must, in turn, pass those words of comfort to those who turn to us for help.

But Jesus calls us to go even further: not just to love our neighbors and our kin, but to love our enemies. This is particularly difficult when we are afraid. But even in the midst of our fear we stand on the solid ground of our faith and proclaim the faith in Christ crucified and risen from the dead. In practical terms, this may mean finding strength in prayer, or in our neighbors, or in our churches, or in acts of solidarity with others who live in fear. This is the hope that casts out fear.

The fear is real. So we pray. We go to church. We remember who we are in Jesus. Our resurrection hope is larger than fear. Let nothing keep us from that hope, that faith, that security in Gods dream for all of humanity.

"Be not afraid!"

**The Most Rev. Michael B. Curry
Presiding Bishop and Primate
The Episcopal Church**

Amen.